

Greening the Desert; Eritrea's Manzanar Mangrove Miracle

Written by Administrator

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By Thomas C. Mountain

Along the nearly barren desert shoreline of the Red Sea there can be found a miracle of green forest stretching over 6 miles (10 kilometers), the Manzanar Mangrove Project.

Started some 15 years ago on the shoreline of Zula Bay, once home to Africa's lost civilization of Punt, a lush, green mangrove forest has been re-established in the middle of thousands of miles of desert and is now providing an estuary for fish and shrimp as well as food for animals. Mangrove leaves and seeds provide almost the complete nutritional needs for goats, sheep and camels, thus providing the people of the area with milk and meat, which along with fish has been their sustenance of life from time immemorial.

All of this is the work of a Japanese American, Dr. Gordon Sato who took his personal fortune obtained through his medical inventions and used it to transform formerly barren sandy silt beaches into an emerald green jungle, 20 feet high, using salt water. That's right, salt water can be used to reforest arid coastlines, even be pumped into the interior and used to green the desert. All it takes is a little nitrogen and phosphorus fertilizer wrapped in plastic with two punctures to allow a time release of the fertilizer. Bury this about two feet under the sand and mangroves can once again grow where they used to flourish, converting a desolate, sand blown coastline into a green miracle of sea life estuary and life sustaining forest.

The lowly mangrove, so often reviled as the source of fetid, insect and disease ridden swamps, holds the key to fighting drought, coastal desertification, coastal erosion and a host of other problems being experienced by the world's oceans. Mangroves ordinarily only grow where there is enough nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus not present in salt water that have been brought by fresh water runoff.

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With the thousands of years long desertification of much of the East and West African as well as West and South Asian coastline, once thriving mangrove forests are now gone, and mangroves are only found in a few isolated spots. But all of that is changing, though one can only wonder why with all the talk about climate change, Dr. Sato is not the recipient of hundreds of millions of dollars in grants to help him spread his miracle throughout the world.

Today, with his personal fortune spent, even though he has received environmental awards from the Rolex Foundation and the Asahi Foundation, funding has dried up and Dr. Sato's work has reached its limit.

And the reason why may be explained by the very concept, three contradictory ideas, Manzanar, mangrove and miracle. First is the name, the Manzanar Project, named after the crime against humanity committed in the USA under the signature of two of the most famous "liberals" in 20th Century USA history, Franklin Roosevelt and Earl Warren. Hundreds of thousands of Japanese Americans were victims of ethnic cleansing carried out under the orders of President Franklin Roosevelt, and the Governor of California, and later Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Earl Warren at the outbreak of WW2. Arrested, thrown in jail with all their property and possessions legally stolen from them and eventually imprisoned in concentrations camps most often in the middle of some pretty nasty deserts, all done by leaders proclaimed as leading lights of liberalism in the USA. One of these camps was named Manzanar and as a small boy, Dr. Sato found himself and his family imprisoned there, convicted of no crime yet treated as criminals, all for being guilty of having the wrong color skin.

Dr. Sato's naming his mangrove project after such a crime is sure to anger the powers that be in the USA dominated aid agencies. On top of this mangroves and miracles are two words that are not used together, almost contradictory in concept in the minds of most in the so called "First World". Manzanar, mangroves and miracles, three very different concepts to say the least. You put them together inside Eritrea and you have another example of how news of another environmental breakthrough with global importance is being suppressed by those in power in the western world, both official and non-governmental.

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