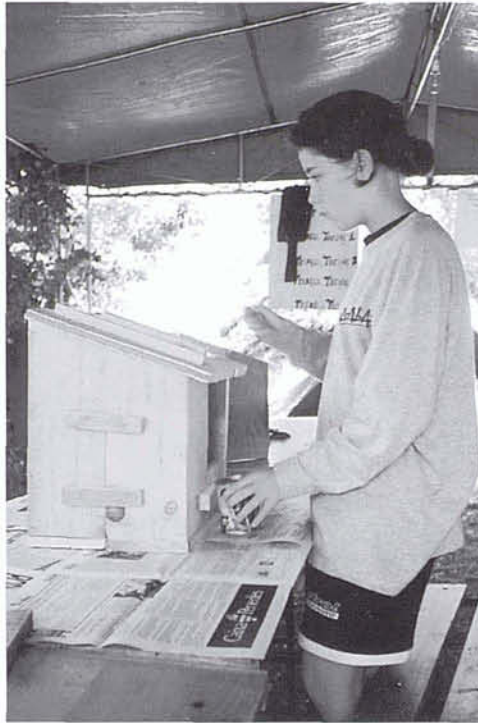


# YOUNG PEOPLE AND ECOLOGY



IN CATALONIA, INCREASED ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS HAS MATERIALIZED IN GREATER INTEREST IN NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS WATCHING OVER THE CONSERVATION OF OUR NATURAL HERITAGE.

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**S**ociety's view of ecology has changed substantially in recent times. Only twenty years ago a large part of the population saw ecologists as a scruffy bunch of people opposed to human progress. Nowadays, on the other hand, few people have not yet realised that natural resources are not inexhaustible and that respect for the natural heritage is one of the conditions for the sur-

vival of civilization. The consequences of current development are clear to all: the greenhouse effect, acid rain, damage to the ozone layer, soil and water pollution, increased desertification, nuclear and chemical accidents, and so on and so on. The idea of the human species's responsibility in the maintenance of the environment is now widespread: human beings belong to the Earth, and not the

other way round. Ecology groups share the conviction that problems must be resolved in the framework of a global approach, which does not by any means exclude local interventions.

In Western societies, a lot of young people have experienced a certain disenchantment with traditional politics, alongside an increased ecological awareness which has materialized in greater in-

terest in Non-Governmental Organisations watching over the conservation of our natural heritage. Catalonia is no exception to this trend. The following are two of the most active ecology organisations in the country.

**Greenpeace.** Born in 1971 when a group of young Canadians managed to halt the United States government's nuclear tests in the North Pacific. Its adoption of direct action has made it one of the best-known organisations in the world. In 1984 it set up a branch in Spain, and soon opened an office in Barcelona providing logistical support for ships sailing the Mediterranean. Before long this office began to develop in its own right. There are two sides to the activities of the young Greenpeace volunteers: to promote the organisation and to demand changes from those in a position to make them. The Catalan office has the same objectives as the organisation on a world level and carries out the same campaigns as in the rest of the world, since the conviction that ecological problems do not respect state borders is central to Greenpeace's way of thinking. In the last year, following such sinister anniversaries as those of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and that of the sinking of the *Rainbow Warrior*, and also because of the French tests on the atoll of Mururoa, the organisation has put the accent on the nuclear threat. Apart from direct action, Greenpeace draws up technical reports, investigates the causes of environmental aggressions, puts forward alternatives and collaborates in environmental education.

**Depana.** The Natural Heritage Defence League is an ecological group which arose in 1976 to fill the gap in the safeguard and restoration of Catalonia's natural he-

ritage, both as regards the countryside and particular species. Depana defends the right of all citizens to live in an environmentally healthy country and to enjoy a higher quality of life. To achieve this it proposes replacing the present model of development. Although it is best known for its campaigns in favour of defence and conservation (Ebro Delta, Montseny, Collserola, Aiguestortes), Depana also directs its energy towards the study and research of nature. It is divided into working groups devoted to specific problems such as the traffic in wildlife and how to reduce waste. Amongst its actions we could mention its nature discovery children's camps, the reintroduction into Catalonia of the *polla blava* (*Porphyrio Porphyrio*) and localized restorations of riverside woods.

In 1992, Depana became a league formed by the two most important ecology movements in Catalonia. At present it has some 5,000 members, most of whom are young people. Amongst the regional organisations that are founder members of DEPANA, ADENC and IAEDEN stand out. The Association for the Defence and Study of Nature (ADENC), based in Sabadell, centres its efforts on the Vallès region, where it carries out specific programmes like the campaigns against useless waste and against the Fourth Ring Road, the organisation of bicycle outings, courses on geology, etc. For its part, the Upper Empordà Institution for the Study and Defence of Nature (IAEDEN), based in Figueres, played an important part in the declaration of the natural park of the Aiguamolls de l'Empordà as a protected area and watches over the conservation of other endangered areas, such as Cape Creus.



These ecological associations are not youth organisations, but most of their members are young people. The opening up of new channels for participation –leaving aside the red tape– and the chance of working in specific interventions in favour of our common heritage means that the number of young people taking an interest in and working for ecology increases year by year. As one Greenpeace slogan says, “If public opinion puts the pressure on, governments have to listen”. In this respect, let me add that one of the fields in which many young people feel happy as public opinion is in ecology. ■