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Shooting for the Sky: Martin Tengler is Part of a Team That Wants to Use Drones to Plant a Billion Trees a Year

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Shooting for the Sky

Martin Tengler is part of a team that wants to use drones to plant a billion trees a year

Martin Tengler '12 can picture a time when aerial drones fan out to map vast reaches of deforested land and then plant thousands of seed pods that will turn wasteland into new forest.

In fact, he can show you the video.

Tengler is part of a startup called BioCarbon Engineering, formed last year at Oxford University, where he was earning his master's degree in global governance and diplomacy.

In February BioCarbon took third place among 800 entries in an international competition, Drones for Good, sponsored by Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, ruler of Dubai. The contest offered a \$1-million first prize. Third place and the associated publicity, Tengler and his colleagues hope, will attract investors.

Raised in the Czech Republic, Tengler was a United World College scholar who majored in international studies—and he became involved in the Entrepreneurial Alliance. He was admitted to a master's program in international business at Tufts, deferred to work for a year, then went to Oxford to study international diplomacy and on to Tokyo University's master's program in economics.



Martin Tengler '12, in Tokyo. Below, members of the BioCarbon Engineering team prepare a drone for a predawn flight in Dubai during the Drones for Good competition.

“That’s why I’m here,” he said, in Tokyo. “So I can add this into my skill set.”

It’s quite a set already. He is the policy and publicity person on the BioCarbon team, which shares entrepreneurial drive and a desire to improve the environment. “We are going to counter industrial scale deforestation using industrial scale reforestation,” says the company’s mission statement.

Part of Tengler’s job has been to help determine where the drone-forestation project might fly. He used his policy and research experience to determine which regions and countries would be best suited to BioCarbon services. The top two: Brazil and South Africa.

A grant from the Skoll Foundation enabled the team to buy drones and to begin design of the planting mechanism. A prototype arrived just before BioCarbon was to compete in the finals of the UAE Drones for Good Award.

He hopes what seems like a futuristic idea will soon become reality. “We get that a lot,” he said, “that ‘You’re too early with this.’ Well, Facebook, Google—they came along at the right time. We’re hoping that now is not too early. That now is the right time.”

—Gerry Boyle '78

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