



Background

Thank you for supporting A Rocha UK. A Rocha UK is a Christian charity that is celebrating twenty years of working for the protection and restoration of the natural world, caring for the earth as a demonstration of Christian hope.

All A Rocha UK's programmes have faced an increased and rapid demand for services in the past year. This has set the backdrop to our new strategy for 2021 – 2025 focused on increasing impact and reach at a national level through an expansion of Eco Church, Partners In Action, Wild Christian, A Rocha UK's events programme and volunteering.

We believe that the next two years provide a rare and urgently needed opportunity to fast forward Church and Christian engagement with the environment. With this in mind our new Mission is: *To equip Christians to protect and restore the environment - for God, nature and all people.*

Eco Church programme

In January 2021 Eco Church marked its fifth anniversary since its launch event at St Paul's Cathedral in 2016 which we celebrated with an online service in March during which we shared stories of churches from a range of different denominations. There are now over 3,900 registered churches in the Eco Church movement reaching over 290,400 congregation members. January also saw Eco Church reach a milestone of 1,000 awards approved, with Hereford Cathedral being the recipient of the 1,000th. All of this progress is happening in a critical year for the climate, ahead of the UN COP26 climate negotiations scheduled to take place in Glasgow in November later this year.

Award applications continue to rise, with our highest number of award applications received in the last 12 month period. We now have reached a total 1,190 awards received by churches which includes a total of 17 Gold awards

A significant 86% of the 42 Anglican dioceses in England, and all six of the Church in Wales dioceses, have now registered as Eco Dioceses with 13 having achieved a Bronze award. The United Reformed Church's West Midlands Synod has become the first across the denomination to achieve an A Rocha UK Bronze Eco Synod award.

In 2020 a new Carbon Footprint Calculator called 360°Carbon was launched and integrated with the new Eco Church app. This was a joint project between A Rocha UK, Climate Stewards and the Church of England which had been piloted by Leeds Diocese.

A Rocha UK recently launched an Eco Church Buildings Volunteer Network, a team of volunteers with church buildings experience keen to help Eco Churches tackle the tricky subject of creating sustainable church buildings. Many of the volunteers are people who have been through the Eco Church journey already and have relevant professional backgrounds.

In 2020 work began to carry out a comprehensive update and expansion to the Eco Church resources. We hope to launch the new suite of resources in July 2021. The resources cover five areas of church life; worship and teaching, management of church buildings, management of church land, community and global engagement and lifestyle.

A new initiative Churches Count on Nature, ran between the 5th and 13th June 2021 with initially over 500 participating churches, it is a citizen-science event covering churchyards across the

England and Wales. It is being jointly run by the conservation charities Caring for God's Acre, Eco Church, the Church of England, and the Church in Wales. It is thought church land, often uniquely unploughed and undeveloped, could be a habitat for precious and endangered plants and other wildlife.

Whilst the original goal for Eco Church was to reach 10% (4,400) of churches in England and Wales by 2025, this has been brought forward to 2023 due to Eco Church's rapid growth over the past 18 months. We are now aiming to reach 15% of churches across England and Wales by 2025 and to see a doubling of awards by 2025 whilst continuing to increase the range of denominations using the framework.

Partner In Action programme

A Rocha UK's Partners In Action (PIA) network supports Christian land managers to improve the quality and biodiversity of their land, share their learning and encourage them to work to engage their local communities. These include churches, community groups, Christian retreat, conference and youth adventure centres across the UK. In September 2020 we welcomed a new Partners In Action Coordinator for the rapidly expanding network which now includes 20 partners. In 2021 we look to increase our PIA network to 24 partners and 2,500 acres. By 2025 this will be 50 projects and 25,000 acres.

Members of our conservation team were able to visit most partners between lockdowns, train staff and work with them on exciting new projects. This includes a vertical garden and wildflower areas at Abernethy Barcaple in Scotland, house martin boxes at St. Madoc Centre in Wales and swift box building at Ashburnham Place, Sussex.

Despite the pandemic and its impacts, our PIA programme is experiencing a surge in interest from organisations wanting to connect with us, as more Christian land managers recognise the importance and urgency to address climate change practically. Already this year the network has been joined by [Stampwell Farm](#) and [The Rock Christian Fellowship](#).

Stampwell Farm is an ancient fruit and livestock farm on the outskirts of Beaconsfield in Buckinghamshire. By using holistic grazing techniques, ecosystem protection and restoration of the farmland they have seen an annual increase in recorded plant, bird and insect species. 'The Rock Christian Fellowship', a church on St. Helena in the South Atlantic (a UK Overseas Territory), is passionate about sharing God's love and good news with the local community as well as caring for nature. Their first conservation project, Seeds of Hope, will see packets of pollinator-friendly flower and vegetable seeds delivered to households on the island.

Wild Christian

Wild Christian is a free monthly email which includes a bible reflection, a nature-related learning blog, actions to help individuals and families to enjoy, nurture and defend nature, and a 'spotlight' article sharing a reflection from a Wild Christian community member. We've recently begun a new six-part blog series on the links between climate change and nature in the UK, of which the first instalment can be viewed [here](#). During the year the scheme has continued to grow rapidly by over 60% in size to reach over 3,000 participants.

Critical to our vision for Wild Christian is that participants can help shape and lead it. We are looking to expand the Wild Christian project team beyond our small



A Rocha UK staff, to provide an opportunity for many more people to contribute their writing, social media, photography and organising skills for creation.

Our Community Nature Reserves

Foxearth Meadows Nature Reserve is a 11 acre community wetland nature reserve in an area of intensively managed farmland on the Essex/Suffolk border. Two Dexter cows known for their placid nature, remain crucial to nature conservation at the reserve, supporting efforts to diversify plant species and improve habitat structure. Monitoring of grazing and mowing regimes continue as a flexible approach to grassland management is developed.

Foxearth Meadows saw a 200% increase in visitors from the local community during lockdowns who accessed the reserve through the public footpaths. Following risk assessments and COVID-19 guidelines some work parties continued work on the riverbank defence works to protect the river bank and river paths; surface drainage work; clearing winter willow; coppicing; hedge planting and plenty more. This allowed Foxearth to continue to welcome and support their volunteers with autism and learning difficulties who had found other activities cancelled.



We have now been able to open the reserve and are holding events including: a dawn chorus walk; an evening bat walk; a moth trapping evening with a catch identification session the following morning; a dragonfly & damselfly identification walk, a church demonstration day, a national meadows day family event plus our two regular outdoor worship services. As part of the Wild Stour valley initiative running in May this year the Foxearth team set out a trial quiz for visitors to encourage children and their families to discover the secrets of reserve. It is downloadable from the A Rocha UK website.

As part of our commitment to keep in touch with supporters a new video update on Foxearth and Wolf Fields is now available on our YouTube Channel [here](#), alongside a virtual online Dragonfly ID session recorded during 2020 National Dragonfly Week. Click [here](#) to view.

Over the past five years A Rocha UK has worked with the local community to regenerate a 3-acre abandoned wasteland in Southall into a community greenspace and wildlife haven called **Wolf Fields**. The project has progressed well with the establishment of an apiary, ponds, orchard, allotments, bird feeding area, storytelling area and sensory garden with disabled access.

Although the planned events for Wolf Fields have been postponed during lockdowns, vital maintenance and small socially distanced work parties have taken place. With Southall hard hit by the pandemic, the reserve has lost much loved and valued volunteers and a tree has been planted in remembrance.

The Wildflower Meadow established last year in contaminated soil, flourished with over 20 different varieties of wild flower identified. Spotted damselflies and dragonflies, including the Large Red damselfly and Emperor dragonfly were frequently seen hovering above the new pond established last year. Two new bee hives were installed and are doing really well thanks to our volunteers. A new Labyrinth is being built in partnership with local churches.

As lockdown eases and people within Southall community are feeling safe to meet outdoors, we are keen to offer a space. The reserve is now starting to welcome visitors.

In May a new Community Education Officer joined the Wolf Fields team working to build on our work with local schools and widen educational activities for the community. A Rocha UK has launched its new education resources suitable for school aged children (3-14 years). These free education plans have been created to aid children in a variety of settings - schools, community groups and churches - to enjoy exploring nature and caring for our planet through both indoor and outdoor activities.

Widening Impact

'Nature-based solutions to climate change' is a UK government priority on the agenda of COP26. A Rocha UK hosted a webinar on 22nd July to explore the issues, with speakers including Juliet Vickery, the CEO of the British Trust for Ornithology, James Pearce-Higgins, Director of Conservation at BTO, and an A Rocha UK Trustee, Mike Moorcroft, principal specialist on climate change at Natural England, and Andy Atkins. You can also now watch the webinar and our recent 'Pastoral care and Climate grief' webinar and subscribe to our YouTube channel [here](#) to receive a notification as soon as new videos are uploaded.

A Rocha UK has produced resource packs for the Climate Sunday initiative exploring the link between climate and nature. The first is already available [here](#) and the second will be available soon. All resources are free to use and downloadable from the Climate Sunday website [here](#). A summary can also be found in Andy Atkins's blog for Climate Sunday exploring the link between climate and biodiversity (available [here](#)).

A Rocha UK's Big Green Vision 2021-2025

In the face of accelerating climate change and species loss we've launched a new vision and strategy for the next five years with what we seek to achieve on a national scale:

- **Land for nature:** We want to see land owned by denominations and networks, Christian organisations and Christian individuals being managed for nature.
- **Christians for nature:** We want to see local churches and Christians engaged in deliberate and on-going action to protect nature and address climate change practically and by using their voice to speak up for change.
- **Nature for all:** We want to see the general public actively benefiting from access to nature on land owned or managed by UK churches, Christian organisations and individuals.

In 2021 A Rocha UK aims to make an even bigger difference by:

- Welcoming ten new Partners in Action to join our Network - rapidly scaling up the amount of land used for conservation
- Inspiring 1,000 more individuals and families to join our Wild Christian community and take action for nature
- Encouraging over 1,000 more Eco Churches in 2021 and reaching our original ten year target of 4,400 Eco Churches at least three years early by 2023
- Increasing access to our nature reserves - giving an opportunity for deeper engagement and participation online and through physical access.
- Building our connections with over 100 current and potential future Christian leaders to guide their organisations and communities to go further faster to care for creation.
- Engaging thousands more churches in lasting action on climate through the Climate Sunday initiative.