



Stories of Hope 2023

STORIES OF HOPE 2023

AN A ROCHA UK PROJECT
PARTNERS  **IN ACTION**

2023 was a year of inspiration and hope. We welcomed 12 new Partners into our rapidly growing Partner in Action network, which now stretches from Dartmoor to the Cairngorms, and from Northumberland and the valleys of South Wales to the remote island of St Helena. Many of our Partners undertook some incredible work for nature and community during the year, and we wanted to share some of their good news stories.

We do hope you will find them uplifting and encouraging! Andy Lester and Regina Ebner, A Rocha UK

arocha.org.uk/partners-in-action/



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Grasslands, native wildflowers, bees, bats, damselflies & dragonflies, amphibians, house martin

Abernethy Barcaple

Dave Crudgington

All about the partner

Abernethy Barcaple is located in a secluded setting in the rolling hills of Dumfries and Galloway, with 17 acres of grasslands, woodlands and a youth adventure centre.

Creation care

One focus this year was to encourage the young team to care for the site in a responsible way and to be able to share the importance of caring for nature. The site is full of beauty giving glory to a Creator, and the aim is to promote this to the guests, regardless of which outdoor activity is taking place.

There have been plans to launch a garden project to run in conjunction with a green-focused session; however, it has struggled to find the necessary impetus and time to get started. That said, there will be sessions early in 2024!

Wildflower areas have been established, but with limited success: some areas have begun to flourish and others have not established as quickly.

Bird boxes have also struggled this year. The house martin nest boxes were used less than in previous years, most probably due to the very dry spring and wet early summer. The nesting box with a camera was used by sparrows early in the year, but they never laid eggs. Three owl boxes were put up in the spring and the team is looking forward to seeing the first arrivals, which might take between two and three years.

The vertical garden on the sports barn has done well, with an inspirational mix of butterflies, bees and birds visiting.

The pond is proving great for dragonflies and at least three species have been seen. However, there are concerns about blue/green algae in the pond and some long-term solutions are being explored.

Finally, thanks to the Tesco Bags of Help scheme, a new shed was erected for garden tools.



STORIES OF HOPE

Launched in November. T25: TBC

Abernethy Kilmalieu

Steve and Liz Aisthorpe

All about the partner

Kilmalieu is an estate on the Ardgour Peninsula on the west coast of Scotland, where the Abernethy Trust is in the process of repurposing one of their outdoor activity centres as a retreat centre and a place of prayer, based on hospitality, adventure, and nature conservation and restoration.

Kilmalieu sits on the north side of Loch Linnhe and comprises almost 3,000 acres of varied habitats from shoreline to mountain-top, including woodland, heath and bog.

The name 'Kil (meaning church or cell) – malieu' suggests that this was the place where St Moluag, a contemporary of St Columba, came to pray, as he and his team were based on the nearby island of Lismore and worked to spread the Christian faith throughout the north of Scotland.

Creation care

In May 2023, a Bioblitz took place. A number of different experts looked at a range of taxonomic groups across all habitats, as well as the habitats themselves, to assess status and indicate management recommendations.

Abernethy Kilmalieu will work sensitively, learning from, and partnering with, the local farming community to help look after an ancient and changing landscape. The prayer is that Kilmalieu will be a place that encourages guests and visitors to notice, understand and be inspired by God's amazing creation. The retreat centre will provide hospitality for up to 18 people, offering opportunities to join the rhythm of prayer and participate in conservation and restoration activities.

Key sightings for 2023 include: great northern divers, whooper swan, white-tailed eagle, common sandpiper, ptarmigan; angle shades, feathered thorn and November moths; red deer, pine marten and other small mammals.

The team is looking forward to seeing how this partnership with A Rocha UK can enable both nature and people to thrive.



STORIES OF HOPE

Launched in May. T25: Grassland, woodland, freshwater, farmland & garden birds, native wildflowers, bees, butterflies, small mammals, common oak, red squirrel

Abernethy Nethybridge

Ali Dreyer

All about the partner

Abernethy Nethybridge is a 25-acre outdoor adventure centre nestled in the northern Cairngorms National Park. Set in the Caledonian pine forest below the Cairngorm mountains, it is famously home to ospreys as well as other birds of prey.

Creation care

School groups are hosted throughout the academic year along with youth camps, churches, non-profit organisations and other groups during the holidays and weekends.

There are a few lawned areas, the mowing of which has recently been limited only to areas needed for activities. There are therefore now some no-mow areas to encourage wild grasses and wildflowers to grow. Among the wildflowers on-site is a variety of local orchid species; hopefully more wildflowers will take root in the coming years.

The canoeing pond has a lot of wild plant life around it and is bordered on two sides by a river and a stream. In the summer, the team removed an infestation of invasive American skunk cabbage from the waterways, to free up space for local species to grow.

Most of the site is forested with pine and mixed woodlands. Being surrounded by a very diverse and remote ancient forest, there is a huge variety of wildlife. There are healthy red squirrel and pine marten populations, with the red squirrel feeders provided by A Rocha UK being well used. Roe deer are regularly seen on-site, with a large population in the surrounding forest. There is a wide variety of local birdlife, with new sightings of goldcrest and redpoll this year. The team are keenly looking out for a sighting of a crossbill, as signs of its presence on the pine cones have been seen. Recently, one of the visiting school groups even spotted a reclusive capercaillie in the forest!

The walled garden on-site was created many decades ago, before it was owned by the Abernethy Trust. It has largely been used as a lawned garden over the years, and the team are now working to restore it to its historical use. This year, non-native species of plants have been cleared and an outdoor educational area has been created where fruit and vegetables will be grown. The idea is that visiting school groups can learn about plant growth cycles, the water cycle, composting and the local ecosystem. Staff will be trained in how to deliver an exciting and interactive programme using the walled garden projects and the surrounding woodland.

The team are looking forward to helping local species thrive and teaching the next generation how to look after their local environments.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Woodland, butterflies, farmland & garden birds, house martin

Adventure Plus

Jon Cox, Matthew Norton

All about the partner

Adventure Plus (A+) is an 80-acre site of meadow, woodland, hedgerows and yurt village in west Oxfordshire, with a developing Adventure Base to provide outdoor activities for all ages.

Creation care

During 2023, A+ worked with around 7,000 young people on school residentials or from youth and church groups, mainly from April to October.

Matt graduated from his Conservation and Outdoor Activities Internship and it was great when he applied to be the first Site Ranger. New Conservation Intern, Rhoda, has begun to undertake similar training to Matt and now works alongside him. Before joining A+, Rhoda was a Seasonal Ecologist, and brings valuable experience and insights here. It was exciting to find a grass snake on the day Rhoda came to decide about the internship!

More than 1,000 hedging plants and trees were planted on-site in 2023. This brought together people of all ages to improve local biodiversity and increase the carbon sink. Within a few short weeks, the new hedges were providing habitat for local wildlife such as the common toad. An excellent job was done of managing all the hedgerows on-site, especially filling in a few gaps. In the summer, the hedgerows were crucial in providing forage on the flowering ivy for bees, when little else was about. These healthy hedgerows contribute to the site's ecological integrity whilst preventing flooding and soil erosion, providing shelter, shade and safety, acting as livestock barriers and pest control. Trees planted last year are doing well overall and are helping to create a transition area between the meadow and the woodland. The woodland was used weekly for bushcraft, from April through to October.

A+ offers practical conservation days and educational activities for all ages, including volunteer weekends to help with the large-scale tasks. However, most of the financial resources were spent on building a shower block this year. In addition, the power lines need to be buried before implementing plans for a lake.

The abundant wildlife on-site has really benefited from the team's efforts and from the wildflowers and long grass. Seeing house martins enjoying swooping over the fields was really special. There are nest boxes for them on the eaves of the reception building, but they also built their own mud nests adjacent to these. In the summer, the butterflies also thrived in the wildflower areas and along the new treeline. Wonderful native species such as commas, gatekeepers and brown argus were seen, as well as a particular abundance of common blues. Other wildlife spotted regularly were hares, green woodpeckers and roe deer, with one-off sightings of a kingfisher and a grass snake. One summer weekend, a marquee was put up and lots of frogs took up residence!



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T25: Freshwater, native wildflowers, house martin

Aldermoor Community Farm

Richard and Kathy Pitt

All about the partner

Aldermoor Community Farm is an urban farm in Southampton with one acre of land and a shop to sell produce. It's a small city-based project focusing on eco-sustainable food-growing, outside and in a polytunnel, with a range of tree species, a pond, wildflower planting and some geese, ducks and chickens.

Creation care

Aldermoor now has several members of staff supported by 35 regular volunteers, demonstrating organic food-growing all year, with fruit and vegetables, edible herbs and flowers. There have been four work experience placements from local schools, while the 17-year-old intern has progressed to a permanent trainee role.

There are four days of volunteering each week to get involved in weeding, sowing seeds, planting, harvesting, picking fruit, digging new duck ponds, wheelbarrowing compost onto beds, and more. It is a great place to build friendships, learn new skills and grow in confidence. Interest from visitors and volunteers remains high as more and more people want to 'grow their own'. There is an 'Introduction to permaculture' workshop every month, which has been enthusiastically received.

Therapeutic gardening sessions for those who might need more support to access the benefits of working on the farm, received a new lead this year. These sessions are working well for local schoolchildren who are not engaging with the mainstream curriculum. The aim is to improve their physical, social and emotional well-being, based around their strengths, age and capacity. The sessions weave together growing, farm work, animal care, nature-based crafts, life skills, mindful emotional regulation and practical literacy, numeracy and science.

A local John Muir conservation group for home-educated children visited regularly this year and made excellent contributions to several conservation tasks that were put before them. In addition, children from a local pre-school nursery visited fortnightly to observe the changing seasons on the farm.

Funding has been given for an experimental food production role, thereby creating a range of fresh sweet and savoury food from the farm's produce, as well as an ever-growing (and popular) range of preserves.

Links are being built with a local social housing provider and next year they will fund weekly coffee mornings and monthly event days to help local residents come to the farm and engage with the natural world.

New and very successful partnerships have been formed with local farms, selling their produce and offering fresh milk, along with other refillable containers of detergents, toiletries and cleaning products.

Creation care

In order to shore up an embankment wall, it was necessary to make an earth bank. As subsoil was used from building works elsewhere on-site, it was a good opportunity to create a wildflower bank. With seed donated by A Rocha UK, there has been a wide range of flowers successfully germinating and setting seed this year, as well as evidence of solitary bees making homes in the bank.

Throughout the week, the produce shop and farm are open to the public for exploration, reflection and volunteering alongside the animals. It was pleasing to see kingfisher twice this year, along with nuthatch and grey wagtail; a breeding pair of buzzards have been successful again this year.

Finally, a new hedgehog house was set up and is ready to welcome its first visitor!



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Grassland, woodland, freshwater, native wildflowers, farmland & garden birds, house martin, common swift, spotted flycatcher, common oak

Ashburnham Place

Paul Wenham

All about the partner

Ashburnham Place is a Christian conference and retreat centre in East Sussex, with 220 acres of mixed woodlands, grasslands, three lakes, formal gardens and fruit orchard / growing area. It is stewarded by the Ashburnham Christian Trust and is home to a serving international community of Christians.

Creation care

The community is made up of around 50 international volunteers serving for between three and twelve months. There are a further 25 full- or part-time staff, the majority of whom live on-site. Of increasing importance has been the contribution of day volunteers, many of whom now hold key roles within the grounds and gardens.

The core business activity of the Trust is as a Christian prayer and conference space, offering church weekends away, with accommodation for up to 242 guests. In the summer, festival-type events take place, when the site welcomes larger groups of 850–2,500 people.

The heart behind the Trust's care of the land is to display what could be possible when humankind exists in a dynamic relationship with God and with the rest of creation. Therefore, the Trust also offers a variety of retreat-based themed events, many of which focus on the land.

Increasingly, the community is growing more of their own produce and there is a greater appreciation of food as a common bond and as an expression of God's gift, to be shared and enjoyed. The Kitchen Garden Managers, together with a team of volunteers, are passionate about producing organic, seasonal food for the table. The Kitchen Garden is also the heart of the care programme, offering a restorative space for men and women struggling with mental health. Towards the end of 2022, a 'Closer to the Land Lead' (CTTL Lead) was appointed. This was a new role borne out of a response to climate change and the growing disconnect society has with land. This has then prompted the question, 'How then shall we live?' The CTTL Lead seeks to initiate these types of conversations, primarily with young people, through a journey of discovery around soil, growing and food.

There have been events in the orchard looking at permaculture and at how food reaches the plate. One such event was an inspiring outdoor 'Journey of Food' in October, co-led by Regina from A Rocha UK. People from nine Partners in Action came together to learn about and explore every aspect of permaculture farming and composting, outdoor cooking and dining.

The ornamental gardens blossomed in spring and a few different varieties of wisteria grew, as well as a range of flowers, plants, fruit trees and hedges. Following a decision not to use any form of chemical weed control across the site, regular weeding parties are set up throughout the growing season. These help visitors enjoy the gardens, as well as keeping on top of weeds!

Creation care

A group explored how to survey the grassland, identified wild sedum and were surprised to uncover lots of tiny froglets. The rich and diverse areas of grassland around the lakes are an important and declining habitat so, thanks to the survey, ongoing monitoring is being put in place, along with a plan to improve the habitat.

A summer moth survey revealed a large number of species, including rivet hawk, poplar hawk and black arches. A hummingbird hawk moth was also spotted in October. It fed repeatedly on salvia hot lips flowers, demonstrating the importance of having different flower shapes and types, as well as late and early flowering varieties in the gardens to provide food for insects all year round.

A dragonfly survey within the grounds found willow emerald damselfly, common darter, a single southern hawker and plenty of migrant hawkers.

The beautiful song of the nightingale was heard for the first time this year. Over the summer, at least two pairs of the charming and subtle great spotted flycatchers successfully bred here, while at least one common swift was prospecting. As a result, swift boxes have been built and will be erected, which hopefully might mean hosting the first breeding pair next year. Also, more house martin boxes have been built to encourage more of these birds. The more ubiquitous residents continue to inspire: squabbling kingfishers, mandarin ducks, ravens and more.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Grassland, woodland, native wildflowers, farmland & garden birds, common toad, bullfinch

Blacknest Forest School

Anne Martin

All about the partner

Blacknest Forest School in Surrey has 12 acres of woodland and grassland areas with a wildflower meadow.

Creation care

Forest schools continued throughout each of the holidays with children engaging with nature. There were around 300 forest school child sessions during eight weeks in the summer, which helped to highlight some of the conservation changes. The children notice and enrich the things that have taken place since their last visit, such as the growth in the wildflower meadow. They also dream about what could be done to advance the direction and progress on the land. It is a symbiotic relationship, and they always love to see the wildlife; frogs and butterflies, for example.

There were three forest church events, with 70 people at the first one and slightly fewer at the latter two. The children from the churches came a few more times to enjoy the woodland.

With the help of Andy and Regina from A Rocha UK, April saw the start of turning an over-grazed field, stripped of fertility by horses, into a rich wildlife meadow. The first steps were rotavating, followed by sowing yellow rattle seeds (yet to be successful). Bamboo from the woodland was used to stake out the area. This keeps the bamboo from spreading too quickly, giving it a purpose and cutting down costs. By the summer, it was incredible to see these four acres teeming with new life; quite a lot was growing in the seeded areas, and it was estimated that the meadow contained over 500,000 grasshoppers – that's half a million lives born to fulfil one of the purposes of nature, to be a source of praise to our Creator! From a scientific point of view, the grasshoppers were making a cacophony of noise because they were breeding and holding territory, but at another level, it was like a symphony playing music to God. There is something truly miraculous about lying in a meadow alive with wildlife and remembering that we serve a God of abundance.

The variety of wildflowers (too many to list) is also wonderful, enriching the soil and attracting butterflies – mainly red admirals and a rare jersey tiger. Dragonflies and damselflies enjoyed the plentiful supply of food, while red kites and buzzards circled overhead.

Improvements were made to the pond to improve the water quality: planting some oxygenated plants and clearing an overgrown area to encourage wildlife. It now attracts many different kinds of aquatic life, such as common lizards, frogs and dragonfly larvae. Pond-dipping was able to continue with the children through forest school.

A variety of plants and trees were added to the woodland. In addition, two exclusion 'no-graze' zones have been created to keep out foraging deer and rabbits so the under-storey is allowed to thicken up year on year. This is becoming established, with the saplings (native trees) and other plants growing to enrich

Creation care

biodiversity. Meanwhile, a large area of rhododendron was cleared because it provides poor habitat for nesting birds and mammals, and is a poor source of food for most species.

Another project has been to try to get a hedge to grow all the way around a particular field. In the dry season, it was very challenging to keep the hundreds of existing small hedging plants alive, but compost and mulch were put all around the edge of every single one, meaning most of them survived. Now, around the edge of the meadow, these young plants are at last beginning to look like a hedge, and layer upon layer of biodiverse plant and insect life tell of the restoration.

Birds are an important part of the story, with at least 19 species of birds breeding and perhaps the same number again found here. This year, quite a few more nest boxes were put up in the woodland and around the woodland edge, with a good mix of different boxes to encourage a wide range of birds. Across the site, there are now almost 30 bird boxes, which should offer protection to breeding birds (if squirrel numbers keep down). It is such a delight to watch the birds feeding and thriving here.

There are wood piles and bug hotels – great protection for insects. Several hives are alive with honey bees which produce wonderful raw honey.

The fruit trees have been doing well, with a bumper harvest of plums. The vegetable garden produced a mass of beans, courgettes and potatoes to share. A great forest school morning was spent digging up potatoes, building a fire and cooking them. It is good to consider the impact of our diet on the planet and our neighbours.

This year, the number and variety of fungi has been astonishing. The forest school leaders produced a brilliant resource with photographs of at least 35 varieties found by the children on the land. **The** children used this to forage for fungi and got excited at how many types they found. Subsequently, the leaders aimed to help them understand what an amazing function fungi perform in enriching the soil, feeding the plants and trees, and creating an important food source for many mammals and insect species as well.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Grassland, woodland, hedgerows, farmland & garden birds, butterflies, bees, house martin, common swift, common oak

Bryn Gobaith

Joy Watson

All about the partner

Bryn Gobaith is a 336-acre farm in the Welsh valleys hoping to become a place of retreat, refreshment, community and hope. The area includes deciduous woodland, upland moorland, upland wildflower meadows and extensive grassland.

Creation care

2023 was the year when it was possible to actually start farming. Early in the year, chickens, a small flock of rare breed sheep, pigs and goats arrived. In addition to starting to work the land in godly, sustainable ways, a lot of time has been spent on addressing farm infrastructure – paths and fences in particular, as well as deciding the layout of fields and garden areas. This is a huge ongoing project.

Jamie, a full-time farmhand, arrived in June, and this has meant that the pace of work has accelerated. Jamie works in every area of need and has been a great addition to the farm and land. Since arriving, he's done lots of fencing, shifting things, building things, animal husbandry and generally being a blessing around the place!

A new partnership has begun with Down to Zero and Cynon Taf Housing, a local housing association, who plan to use some space for a community growing and well-being project. They will grow vegetables in a polytunnel, plant fruit trees and hopefully introduce beehives, alongside erecting a well-being cabin and installing a biochar kiln. This will enhance the main focus of providing and cultivating a safe place for vulnerable people in the community. All will be invited to come and enjoy the space, which the team at Bryn Gobaith are excited about as it matches their values and hopes for the future.

Last spring, 1,000 saplings were planted which will become a new hedgerow for one of the fields. The hedgerow was planted by a small team of local volunteers from the community. It has been growing well and has been protected as the sheep have moved into that field. The hope is to do the same thing in another field in spring 2024.

This year a barn owl, a tawny owl and a kestrel were seen at the farm. Also seen and heard were regular bees, buzzards, plenty of garden birds, woodpeckers and cuckoos. A greater spotted woodpecker is a regular visitor to the garden's bird table. An adder was spotted in the yard this summer, although it is understood there are many more on the land! The pigs, chickens, sheep and naughty goats have also become great contributors to life here at Bryn Gobaith Farm.



STORIES OF HOPE

Launched in April. T25: Grassland, freshwater

CCT – High Leigh

Anthony Clifford

All about the partner

CCT High Leigh is part of the Christian Conference Trust (CCT) in Hertfordshire, which specialises in residential and day conferences for up to 220 delegates. Set 40 acres of land which includes a water feature, stream woodland, countryside and farmland.

Creation care

During 2023, there were 49,627 visitors, including church, youth and other groups.

CCT has rededicated itself to God this year by restating its commitment to His creation, through the growth of the partnership with A Rocha UK (which now includes High Leigh centre). In April, to celebrate this, the first trees for the apricot orchard were planted. Apricot trees naturally grow in countries with warmer climates, such as China. However, the UK summers have been getting hotter and longer which has allowed the successful growth of them here. The orchard produced fruit within the first few months of planting, which came as a great surprise!

There has been a carbon footprint reduction within the year as High Leigh has replaced light bulbs with LED lights and had electric car charging-points installed. They have completely stopped using single-use plastic and source their meat from local butchers.

Quite a lot of the grasslands have been dedicated to be managed as wildflower meadows and wildlife corridors across the site. Some seeding of yellow rattle has been done in spaces that had very thick grass growth, and this has been successful. The biodiversity of the site has therefore increased as both wildlife and nature have been left to take their course. A route was created within the meadow for people to walk and enjoy the open space.

In the spring, 500 hedgerow saplings were planted with a 75% grant from the Woodland Trust along with CTT support.

The shrubbery along the stream has been thinned out to let more light and wildlife into that area.

Bird and bat boxes have been installed to provide habitat and to allow more effective monitoring of these target species.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Grassland, native wildflowers, bats, common toad, common swift, hedgehog

CCT – The Hayes

John Wing

All about the partner

CCT The Hayes Centre in Derbyshire sits in 138 acres of mature grounds, which include lakes, streams, woodland, countryside and farmland. Part of the Christian Conference Trust (CCT) in the beautiful Derbyshire countryside, it can provide residential conferences for up to 400 guests.

Creation care

Throughout the year, over 69,780 people have stayed at the centre. The Hayes has held team meetings, church weekends away, youth group breaks, exhibitions and training events.

The centre has been working hard on making the many thousands of meals they serve more environmentally friendly. They are committed to sourcing as much locally produced food as possible, buying in-season produce, reducing the number of food miles, helping to lower carbon emissions and supporting local farms and businesses. The local butcher is less than a mile from the centre.

There has been a carbon footprint reduction within the year, with 100% renewable electricity and the ending of single-use plastic usage. Four additional charging-points were installed to accommodate the increased use of electric cars, and only eco-friendly cleaning chemicals were used wherever possible. For the first time ever, a carbon footprint audit was commissioned; the team have been working their way through this to reduce the footprint even further.

During the year, fences continued to be replaced with hedgerows, which have included 400 new plants; 400 tree saplings were planted in addition to 400 the previous year. An additional beehive was added to the existing two, and this year the bees produced 130 jars of honey for sale in the shop.

The Hayes is home to a variety of insects, amphibians, reptiles and mammals. The approach taken for garden maintenance and land management is to time tasks correctly, leave adequate space undisturbed, as well as create additional habitats in quieter areas. No insecticides and only a very limited amount of herbicide are used. During the nesting season, no intrusive hedge-cutting is done; any hedge-cutting that is required is only done after a thorough inspection of the hedge for any active nests.

There are a number of wilder areas that are mostly unmanaged or managed very lightly to remove unwanted plant species. The aim is to allow for a variety of grassland habitats to maximise the species of wild grasses and flowers.

Two hedgehog boxes were placed within the grounds thanks to A Rocha UK.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Grassland, freshwater, woodland, native wildflowers, butterflies, bees, bats, house martin, English oak, hedgehog

Chinnor Churches Go Wild!

Brian Griffiths, Jo Whitfield

All about the partner

Chinnor Churches Go Wild! (CCGW!) is run by a group of Anglican and Methodist volunteers from local churches in and around Chinnor. An alliance of five churches, close to the Aston Rowant Nature reserve who aim to promote and protect the natural environment in the churchyards, encourage congregations, improve wildlife habitat in the area and engage more local people with creation care.

Creation care

Over the year, there were various events that combined the spiritual and the environmental. On a chilly March morning, forest church was held at St Andrew's Church. An outside family event attended by around 30 people of all ages on 'The Beauty of God in Springtime' was co-led by Jo Whitfield of CCGW and Anne Martin of Blacknest Forest School. There was a scavenger hunt looking for early signs of spring, linking scripture verses and prayers to what was found.

In May, a Rogation Service called blessings upon the planting of seeds. In June, Bishop Gavin led the children from the church school on a pilgrimage through Chinnor village to the Community Garden, where the children had their lunch, followed by a scavenger hunt. The bishop prayed at key places along the way: especially poignant was the stop at Chinnor Methodist Church because it was celebrating its 150th anniversary.

In September, local ex- army resident, keen forager and ferreter Marcus Wood led a Forest Church session at Cowleaze Woods, part of Aston Rowant Nature Reserve. It was delightful to have around 40 adults and 20 children attend this most informative and enjoyable time. After a short service of singing and environmental prayers, and a choice of circular walks through the reserve, guests were sent to forage along the hedgerows. Photograph ID sheets were provided to help engage in God's creation by looking for the seasonal signs. Marcus pointed out where many of the fungi, berries, trees and flowers could be found (perhaps a little early for some). A verse from Genesis chapter 1 was read and the service concluded with a final blessing. Harvest Festivals were held in all CCGW churches in autumn, with the Aston Rowant service held outdoors.

Each year, CCGW does surveys of wildlife under the direction of Tim Arnold, a wonderful wildlife expert and guide. It was a glorious day in May for the bird walk when a group of ten, plus leader, met at The Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church in Crowell. The day began with a prayer and an introduction on listening to bird calls and songs: 22 species were spotted, including goldfinch, goldcrest, song thrush and buzzard. In addition, speckled wood, brimstone, female orange-tip and holly blue butterflies were spotted, plus a common blue damselfly. It was a very exciting and interesting two hours, walking happily together in the

Creation care

sunshine with a very knowledgeable guide. The two children who came took a great interest in, and were in awe of, all they were being shown.

A moth survey was held one Saturday night in June and 15 moth species were identified. The moth box was opened during the church service on the following Sunday morning. It was exciting to show people what was caught and talk a bit about some of the species found.

A bat survey evening was held in July. Tim led 20 people on a bat walk around Aston Rowant Church using bat detectors and information sheets for identification. The most common bat 'seen' was the pipistrelle; others were soprano-pipistrelle, brown long-eared and a Natterers bat. In total, about two dozen bats were heard.

Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOW) sponsored the purchase of bird boxes of various sizes to attract different birds, and these provided a focus for family events in the churchyards and village Bank Holiday festivals.

Subsequent to the highly successful Foraging Church event, the leader (Marcus Woods) gave an evening talk in church in November. The subject was healthy eating and the advantages of natural rather than artificial additives. About 15 attended and it was very well received.

It's been another active and enjoyable year during which the CCGW team continued to follow the biblical mandate to be good stewards of God's earth and provision.



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Launched in January. T25: Grassland, freshwater, woodland, native wildflowers, dragonflies & damselflies, house martin, hedgehog

Cilrath Fach Farm

Peter and Jackie Sargent

All about the partner

Cilrath Fach encompasses 34 acres of traditional Pembrokeshire Farmstead, a grade two listed farmhouse and outbuildings. It comprises old meadows, an ancient woodland, small wildlife lake and wetland habitat. Having been run sympathetically as a low-impact smallholding producing 'happy' pork, lamb and free range eggs mainly for their own consumption, land managers Peter and Jackie see their land as a beautiful gift from God. They increasingly want to protect and regenerate this outstanding heritage landscape with its diverse fauna and flora as a way to honour the Creator.

On the holding, there is an off-grid campsite for 'Greener Camping Club' members and an acre of land called Cilrath Acre which is a community growing project where many volunteers engage in permaculture-based horticulture. Volunteers from the local community help for a couple of mornings a week in all aspects of community growing and food resilience. Education, social contact, good mental health, conservation and local food resilience are key components of the activities on Cilrath Acre, with half the produce going to Pembrokeshire Food Bank.

Creation care

They have embarked on an ambitious woodland restoration scheme, planting over 1,500 trees, and have plans to plant a further 500 each year over the next seven years.

In October, 'Little Acorns at Cilrath' (a Sunday forest group for children with their families) changed its name to 'Acorns at Cilrath'. This was to reflect the increasing number of adults wanting to participate in the growing woodland and meadow community group which meets under a parachute canopy, exploring God's creation and enjoying delicious fireside treats and countryside fun. Regular repeat visitors to Cilrath Acre and Acorns at Cilrath were in excess of 60 people, with an average of around 30 having attended each week.

Adjoining the 12 acres of woodland at the farm are two additional acres of woodland belonging to a neighbour. These two acres had previously been neglected and were inaccessible, but during the last year Cilrath Fach have successfully negotiated a management agreement for this area and consequently have now gained control of all the ancient woodland known as Cilrath Wood.

Highlights this year include yellow rattle becoming naturally established across one of the meadow fields. With the help of two Dexter cattle steers, a second meadow has been encouraged to revert to its traditional meadow status. Acorns – self-seeded thanks to some industrious squirrels – have been growing on the ancient wild meadow margins and are now enclosed to form a new natural woodland copse. In addition, there has been a resident grass snake, while kites nested again. Wild trout spawned for the fourth year,

Creation care

seemingly against the odds, with a number of trout fry successfully maturing. It is hoped that the more frequent visits by kingfishers observed this year balance the wild trout nursery and don't adversely affect the young trout becoming established.

In entering into a partnership with A Rocha UK, Peter and Jackie plan to help increase awareness and enjoyment of nature, and educate and engage visitors to address the climate emergency and ecology crisis. They take great pleasure in sharing their beautiful little portion of the earth with their guests, and especially seeing young families enjoying the ancient woodland, the delightful scents and sounds of the countryside and discovering little creatures during their stay.



STORIES OF HOPE

Launched in October. T25: woodland, dragonflies & damselflies, butterflies, amphibians, red squirrel

The Coptic Orthodox Church (COC)

Angela Mikhail

All about the partner

The COC Centre in Stevenage, Hertfordshire, is based in a beautiful Victorian Gothic manor. It was built in 1865, and its grounds have been home to The COC Centre in the UK for over 20 years. The centre caters for a wide variety of spiritual, youth, social, pastoral and ecumenical activities that engage communities at the local, national and international level. It is also the site of The Cathedral of Saint George, Britain's first Coptic Orthodox Cathedral.

The second site of the COC is The Bethel Centre which hosts conferences and retreats. Set in beautiful grounds by the River Blackwater in Essex, it houses a 19th-century chapel designed by John Francis Bentley, the ecclesiastical architect behind Westminster Cathedral.

Creation care

As part of a Sunday service at St George's Cathedral, a launch event involving over 200 people including about 30 children, was held at the end of October. This celebrated the launch of the partnership with A Rocha UK at both the Coptic Orthodox Cathedral in Stevenage and The Bethel Centre in Braintree, Essex.

In addition, the first conservation project began, with the help of the congregations, children and youth, which focused on creating homes for nature. The aim is to make a positive impact on the environment, providing improved habitats for birds and pollinating insects. The children enjoyed decorating and painting bird boxes, turning each one of them into vibrant works of art. Next, after splitting into teams, attendees embarked on a search to find perfect locations for the bird boxes. Each of the nearby trees was investigated, observing factors such as sunlight, height and shelter, making sure birds would find the boxes and feel safe in their new homes. The children are eagerly anticipating the arrival of new bird friends and excited to see which box will be used first. As well as the bird boxes, new bird feeders were installed following the event. They were filled with an assortment of seeds and fat balls to help during the season when there is less food to be found in nature around us.

Another project that started recently was the planting of strategically selected trees in front of the Manor. The centre of the tree-planting area will consist of a wildflower area that welcomes people to come in and enjoy some time surrounded by nature in this contemplative space. The trees were carefully selected to be not only beneficial for pollinating insects but also to bear fruit for people to enjoy. Additionally, after considering the challenges posed by climate change, trees were chosen that could thrive in drier and hotter summers.

Wildflower seeds were also sown along a designated strip of land near the newly planted fruiting trees, creating a beautiful boundary between road and trees. Through this, the hope is to provide a haven for bees, butterflies and other pollinators. This space is a reminder of the commitment to care for nature, people and climate. It is great to have started the journey with A Rocha UK and the team look forward to working together over the years, and creating more focused conservation projects for The Bethel Centre.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Grasslands, freshwater, native wildflowers, maco moths, small mammals, bats, common swift

Corrymeela Community

Michael McCartney

All about the partner

Corrymeela has a residential centre on the north coast of Northern Ireland that hosts over 11,000 people a year, as well as a live-in community of volunteers and staff. There is also a dispersed community of over 150 members who commit to living out Corrymeela's principles of reconciliation in their own communities. The site covers ten acres and is a mix of scrub, gardens, wildflower meadows and food-growing areas.

Creation care

In the spring, members of the Creation Care Network (NI) and NI Partners in Action (of A Rocha UK) enjoyed a wonderful Hub event, learning and sharing at the beautiful house and grounds of Drumalis Retreat Centre. Those from Corrymeela were able to share their experiences and hear from those who had run eco fairs and eco services. It was also beneficial to hear about Eco-congregation Ireland, what resources were being developed and what grants could be available locally.

In April, an awareness event called 'Lighten our Darkness' was held at the local community centre in Ballycastle, depicting hope for our planet. More than 100 people witnessed students from the parish church of Mullingar (Co. Westmeath) put on their own dramatic work based on passages from the biblical book of Numbers. Through engaging choreographed sketches, the students illustrated both the threat to the environment from climate change, and a hope for the future where all are in better relationship with creation and one another. It was an inspiring event for all who attended.

In the summer, Songs of Praise presenter Claire McCollum visited the Corrymeela Community. She toured the site and discovered the story of its founder, Ray Davey, and his mission for a more peaceful Northern Ireland. She met students from California visiting Corrymeela for the first time, heard what they've learnt from their experience and what they'll take back to their own communities. Claire also visited the polytunnel, which is often used with groups as a classroom to talk about our shared relationship with the earth and the future we can create together.

At the end of August, members, staff and friends from local community groups and elsewhere came together to participate in the annual working weekend, helping to maintain the centre, as well as to share stories and prayer. Conversations over meals and in the midst of weeding, pruning, moving manure and painting, were opportunities to deepen friendships, partnerships and experience that unity which is at the heart of Christian mission. It was great to see the progress at the end of the weekend and thank God for an experience of how much more effective we are when we work together!

Northern Ireland Bat Group have been taken on to survey the bats on-site and explore why the boxes are not being used yet. This promises to be an extensive survey using thermal and infra-red cameras.

The wildflower areas continue to be managed, although the mowing regime has changed in some parts and the area has been increased by over an acre.

Creation care

Two volunteers are now allocated to help in the polytunnel as part of their training and duties. Fruit and veg have been growing well in the polytunnel, and community members and guests are encouraged to get involved in this. A lot of the produce now goes to the Ballycastle Foodbank, or to Corrymeela's community fridge to be enjoyed by both on-site residents and visitors.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Grassland, woodland, bats, macro moths, common swift, red squirrel

Drumalis

Sister Margaret Rose

All about the partner

Drumalis is a retreat centre on the edge of the city of Larne, County Antrim, Northern Ireland. It is owned and managed by the Sisters of the Cross and Passion, and has 19 acres of deciduous woodland, lowland meadows, ponds and formal gardens.

Creation care

Drumalis is in a stage of transition, making provision for the future and the need for change, alongside the commitment to its core values to offer an 'oasis of peace on the journey of life'. The journey of post-Covid recovery continues. Considerable energy has been put into staffing and management structures. It has been great to welcome back many longstanding groups, along with new ones, for programmes and retreats, as well as being able to offer guided tours for the first time since 2019. Parish retreats have taken place for the first time since 2019, with retreatants from Larne, Glenarm, Ardboe and St Paul's, as well as ladies arriving by ferry from Scotland for their 'Three Towns Retreat'. Churches from Templepatrick, Cairncastle, Antrim, Whiteabbey, Holywood and Belfast have used the centre for their own events. The association with Eco-Congregation Ireland continues to be enriching.

Members of the Creation Care Network and Partners in Action (NI) joined together at Drumalis to learn and to share with each other. Discussions also included areas where greater input would be useful, such as practical and theological creation care education as well as meeting the needs of the local community. A highlight was 'The Threading of the Rope Ceremony', a ritual that takes place in a number of A Rocha projects worldwide – in one case to keep elephants out!

June saw the most significant and oldest tree on-site, the Catalpa tree, irreparably damaged by the elements. Since then, it has been a priority to work with local tree surgeons to make the area around the remaining part of the tree safe.

This year, two more bird boxes have been installed in the woodland, along with specialised swift boxes on the roof of the building. A swift 'caller' has also been installed to attract the nearby adults. In addition, some species of birds are returning: herons (six active nests), swifts, buzzards and ravens. Tadpoles returned this year too.

2,000 more trees were planted. In addition, much of the formal garden has been returned to the wild. Last year, three new wildflower areas were created by changing the mowing regime and roping areas off. In July, these showed an exciting improvement, with 23 species of flowering plants seen in an area of less than 20 square metres!

The young wooded area (the cross field) has been enhanced with an array of woodland wildflower seeds, and a small area of lawn has been sown with some yellow rattle seeds to prepare it for better growth of meadow wildflowers.

Creation care

A recent challenge is that the lawns have been torn apart by badgers. It is difficult to take control of the situation in an environmentally friendly way.

Inside the house, the recycling programme has improved. Empty coffee pouches and confectionery wrappers are recycled for money to help a local children's playgroup. This is in addition to the usual recycling of paper, bottles and cans. This may all seem very human-oriented, but when considering the enriching and inspirational effect of this on wildlife, plants and animals, it is worthwhile.

Finally, the installation of solar panels was due to commence at the beginning of November 2023. However, there was a delay as the company had not received the necessary paperwork to allow the work to begin. This has been resolved and there is a new plan for installation early in 2024.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Grassland, freshwater, hedgerows, native wildflowers, d & d, amphibians, farmland & garden birds, bees, bats, butterflies, macro moths, small mammals, common toad, bullfinch, marsh tit, spotted flycatcher

Foxearth Meadows Nature Reserve

Mark Prina, Andy Jowitt

All about the partner

One of A Rocha UK's nature reserves, comprising 11.5 acres of wetland on the River Stour floodplain in north Essex. It has a variety of habitats including the river and riverbank, wetlands and woodland, an ancient field boundary, a series of ponds and marshy flower-rich grassland.

Creation care

It is a delight to welcome groups to the reserve and help them to enjoy being close to nature: the families who come to our National Meadows Day event; the nature buffs and beginners alike who enjoy the ever-popular dragonfly ID walks; groups like Causeway, The Bridge and FortKnights, whose members share the same needs as all of us to connect with nature, learn about it, enjoy it and benefit from it. Those from the Bridge Project come to enjoy learning about nature as well as to help with conservation tasks such as making the paths easier and safer to walk on by spreading shreddings. There's a real sense of a job well done; it's heart-warming to see the pleasure and pride in a task done well.

This year, more local churches have taken advantage of the reserve to worship, pray, reflect and have fun in the great outdoors. New Life Church spent a morning here doing just that, following the theme of 'Walking with God: A Journey Together'. Blessed with a dry and mostly sunny day, the atmosphere was wonderful. Attendees enjoyed the area, accompanied by birdsong, busy insects, flowers, scents, colours and textures to absorb, as well as sharing through practical activities. One example was using an OS map to search for landmarks and points of interest and importance – a reminder to search for the things God will reveal to us.

On a beautiful late spring afternoon, 75 people gathered for the 'Sound of Running Water' themed open-air service. Another service was held in September, entitled 'Bugs, the Bible and Insect Decline', with special guest Revd Dr Mike Perry, Chair of Trustees for A Rocha UK; 65 guests attended.

A prayer walk on Ascension Day encouraged us to look up to the skies for guidance and to see the wonder of creation and God's care for us, as we cry to Him for help.

Many individuals and families enjoyed the family-friendly event on National Meadows Day on 1 July. There were nature-based crafts, art activities which were adaptable for different abilities, nature ID walks, bug hunting and a quiz trail to follow to help visitors explore the reserve. In addition, there were some engaging displays about dragonflies and damselflies. The ever-popular dragonfly ID walks in July were very productive, with about a dozen species being spotted and identified on each walk. It was good to see three generations enjoying the same walk and youngsters lapping up the knowledge.

Churches Count on Nature, a collaboration between A Rocha UK, Caring for God's Acre and others, invites churches to mobilise their local community to collect data on the wildlife in their churchyards during Love

Creation care

Your Burial Grounds week. The Foxearth Meadows team helped facilitate local school activities that involved hunting for wildlife, building a bug palace and planting flowers.

In August, the team hosted Sudbury Causeway Fellowship, a Christian-based club for adults with learning disabilities. Nearly 20 club members came, together with helpers, family members and support workers, making 33 in total. Games, crafts and worship followed a picnic lunch. The focus was on God's care for the sparrows and His care for us.

Three local churches with strong links to the reserve conducted botanical surveys and compiled impressive plant lists. Thanks are due to the Lavenham Natural History Group members, who were wonderfully helpful in providing expertise and sharing their knowledge.

Regular conservation volunteering sessions run on Fridays. Recent tasks have ranged from scything riverside meadow to constructing simple wayside benches, from path maintenance to reed-cutting on the ponds, from coppicing hazel and willow to slicing the cut wood for craft activities with visiting groups. Then there are the regular tasks like topping up bird feeders and taking dipwell measurements to chart water levels.

A recent Friday focus was pole-driving to prepare for the creation of a two-metre dead hedge in front of the storage area. It's dead in that, in contrast to a laid hedge, the wood is not connected to living roots, but it can still be full of life.

In the summer, the focus was on opening up access for a digger which came in September to dig out some of the smaller ponds which were silted up and overgrown. Common darters were laying eggs in the newly-created open water almost immediately! Volunteers have worked hard to keep the paths in good order, building some up in wet ground to try and keep them dry and reasonably passable. Additional jobs have been laying blackthorn, coppicing willow and hazel, cutting and raking off sections of meadow and erecting and dismantling the gala tent which hosted several school groups.

Local naturalist Darren Underwood kindly conducted a breeding bird survey over six visits from April to June. He recorded 25 breeding species and 87 breeding pairs. The one Red List species breeding on the reserve is the cuckoo. There were a number of Amber List species, including the wren which, at 11 breeding pairs, was the most numerous here. The wren has a song which seems out of proportion to its small size, but its high notes and staccato trills are not as loud as the explosive song of the Cetti's warbler which is now among the breeding birds. It was pleasing to have confirmation of two water rail breeding pairs; easier to hear than to see. Darren noted a further 13 species seen on the reserve but probably breeding outside it.

A recent exotic visitor was a kookaburra. It has been in the area for several years but just this year has been frequenting the reserve. Also, regular moth trapping yielded a special find: Dewick's Plusia.

Mark has been the Reserve Manager since Foxearth Meadows first became an A Rocha UK project in 2015. He has a deep knowledge of the natural world and wisdom in how to care for it. He also has a gift for connecting with people and has inspired, informed and encouraged people of all ages and abilities, from primary school children to seasoned nature buffs, and from teenagers on work experience to ordinands training for church ministry. Mark retired at the end of December 2023. He will be deeply missed, and the team thank him for all his hard work. A new Reserve Manager will start in January 2024.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Grassland, native wildflowers, bees

Hazelnut Community Farm

Rev John White

All about the partner

Hazelnut Community Farm is a small community farm near Bristol with an acre of land. Inspired by permaculture principles, they aim to create natural spaces of peace where the land and its creatures can flourish and to give away at least 50% of the food they grow.

Creation care

Hazelnut is both a church plant and a network. On the one hand, it is now 'a rooted community of about 40 people' who follow the seasons, being busiest at seedtime and harvest, and quietest in the winter. They meet twice a week on Sunday and Thursday afternoons, to grow food, to build friendships and find peace. In the height of summer, this Grow Together group came to water and weed while the rest of the year, right into the winter, they continued regular planting. This builds community and prepares for the next year.

In March 2023, the group had to relocate to a new space in east Bristol. The new land they now use belongs to the local church of St Anne's who they have since been working closely with and building good relationships. The move was organised through the Diocese of Bristol and, though the spot is much smaller, it has many more people who use it daily. The team have been maximising the available growing space and were excited to get stuck into the life of the community.

In May, an exciting challenge was launched to encourage young people to connect with nature and learn growing skills. This was done in partnership with Ashburnham Place under the name of 'The Golden Turnip Challenge'. The idea was that, in the coming months, children could grow fruit and veg in a small space to be in with a chance of winning a prize. Young people across the UK became excited about growing their own food.

In October, the farm featured on the BBC's Songs of Praise. It was a great opportunity to share with the whole UK how to do church differently and how to connect people to nature more closely.

An in-person conference was held on the site, with Messy Church Ministry lead Aike Kennett-Brown as guest speaker. The day was a mix of practical gardening projects and teaching, and the 30 people who came enjoyed it enormously, taking back practical advice to their own patch.

Over the year, John from Hazelnut Farm and Regina from A Rocha UK took part in regular webinars, sharing the importance of unlocking the power of church land, of connecting with the land as a way to connect to the Creator, of engaging in practical conservation and 'caring for creation in your own backyard'.

Finally, the team ran Potting Shed – a training programme designed to gather and equip people who are developing new worshipping communities formed around growing projects or community gardens. In this weekly programme, participants joined together through the practical, spiritual and theological elements of developing a thriving faith-based growing community.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Woodland, farmland & garden birds, small mammals, house martin

Heatree Activity Centre

Simon Plumley

All about the partner

Heatree Activity Centre is a Christian residential outdoor centre, situated within Dartmoor National Park in south-west England. The land covers 350 acres of woodland, grassland, hedgerows and freshwater habitats including a stream, a few ponds and areas of wetland.

Creation care

This year Heatree has been thinking more about how to utilise their assets of the countryside to help children encounter God through adventure. There are a variety of habitats across the estate and there have been discussions around transforming what currently exists into what could be made possible. As a consequence, available funding has been sought to invest in conservation areas which can be opened up to visitors. In addition, the explanation of Heatree's vision and mission statements has been reworded to help simplify what they do and why they do it.

It was a good summer for bookings, with many visiting church groups and youth camps. At the start of the autumn term, six new staff members were appointed.

This year the team nominated someone to write an environmental management plan which looked at the land and assessed how best to manage the different habitats. For the woodland, a recommendation was for positive intervention to do some active thinning, and this will begin in the new year. Subsequently, the hope is that the timber will either be used on the estate or sold.

In addition, arrangements have been made with a local organic farmer to borrow some livestock to enrich the pasture land.

Six house martin nests were in use this year: half were artificial and half built by the birds themselves. The house martins bred successfully. There were a number of small migrant birds that arrived in spring: chiffchaff, willow warbler, blackcap and a cuckoo pair were heard over the moors.

In October, Hilary, a licensed handler, found nine dormice sleeping happily in their nests in various locations around the estate. Earlier in the year, 25 dormouse nest boxes were installed as well as various tunnels. These small tubes will help determine the presence of dormice (a legally protected species) within the woodland and hedgerows, and will help the team survey and monitor these tiny rodents who are rarely seen as they spend most of the day asleep!

In summary, there has been a real focus on the charity's mission of creating outdoor adventure learning experiences, through which one can discover more about the Christian faith and have life-changing encounters with God.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Grassland, hedgerows, freshwater, woodland, native wildflowers, farmland & garden birds, bees, bats, butterflies (Duke of Burgundy), macro moths, grassland fungi, house martin, spotted flycatcher, English oak

Hilfield Friary

Richard Thornbury, Brother Hugh

All about the partner

Hilfield Friary is an intentional community of brothers of the First Order of the Society of St Francis and lay community of men, women and children, committed to sharing in the Franciscan life and work of the Friary. It is set in 50 acres of Dorset countryside of grassland, woodland and wildflower meadows.

Creation care

Each week various guests come on-site, joining the community of around 25 which includes four brothers. These have included solo retreat visitors who have come for many years, groups from churches, theological colleges and other communities, or third order Franciscans and interfaith groups. On the first and third Wednesday of each month, rain or shine, volunteers come to help weed, plant, prune, make compost and more in the Friary Gardens.

This year, the team has started to be more intentional with educational and school groups who come roughly once or twice a month. The idea is to explore together the wonder of creation – for example, through practical tree conservation – and at the same time sharing how the way of relating to the land is an embodiment of Franciscan spirituality. It is also wonderful that this is supported by the government as part of the Countryside Stewardship agreement, providing a source of income.

In March, a contingent of volunteers from Ashburnham Place came to help with conservation work and land improvement. They worked incredibly hard and Hilfield are very grateful for their enthusiasm and friendship. In April, the Friary hosted a Garden Weekend with plenty of opportunities to get hands in the soil. A community member led the programme where participants learned about composting, Franciscan spirituality and sustainable living.

A weekend of 'Reconnecting to the Divine in Nature' in June was well attended, and people felt inspired by rediscovering the awe and wonder of nature.

Over 2023, the community at Hilfield Friary completed the tree planting to mark the Friary's centenary: 100 oaks were planted for the 100 years, along with 150 other trees made up of 17 native species. Over the next 100 years, this will grow into a new area of wood pasture, which is one of the most diverse habitat types in the UK.

The planting of a new orchard made up of local heritage varieties of apple, pear, plum and cherry has been finished. This not only creates a valuable habitat, but helps to protect these rare local cultivars which are disease-resistant and adapted to local conditions, thus preserving the genetic resource they represent.

There has been more hedge-laying for habitat creation on border areas and mulching the new hedge. This all helps to create wildlife corridors for many species between various woodland areas and council-run forestry behind the Friary. These initiatives are supported by Natural England, provide biodiversity and

Creation care

encourage a thriving ecosystem.

Care for the wildflower meadows continued, which was a challenge with the wet weather over the hay-making season.

Flood risk management has been a focus this year, with various different nature-based solutions being implemented, including attenuation ponds, swales and bunds. These catch water at times of high rainfall and release it slowly back to the watercourses, helping to ameliorate flow rates and reduce flooding downstream. They are also an important habitat in their own right. This has kick-started a new catchment-wide enterprise along the River Wriggle, bringing local people together to work for the shared interests of flood management and water quality, helping to improve the value of the river at a landscape scale. This is exciting as it has helped build relationships with neighbouring landowners who Hilfield now have a rare chance to work with. It is great to see the appetite for more sustainable and environmentally friendly farming, especially among some of the large commercial farms, and to partner with them as they explore this approach.

The local conservation cluster of neighbouring landowners working together to enhance the conservation value of the land has also flourished, growing in breadth and depth. It now includes 12 individuals and organisations managing over 1,000ha, cooperating and coordinating work to help develop a landscape-scale approach to conservation. It is particularly interesting as it encompasses a range of different landowners with different commitments and pressures, from the local Wildlife Trust, the local council, small woodland owners, commercial dairy farmers and everyone in between.

One focus for the cluster over the years has been the Duke of Burgundy butterfly, of which there are two colonies on the land, one within the cluster and another at the other end of the cluster from Hilfield. The group has been working to maintain the very specific conditions it likes at the existing colonies and create a corridor of suitable habitat in between. The really exciting news this year was discovering this species in a new area.

Funding was received in 2023 to undertake a series of bat surveys. These included trapping, tagging and radio tracking along with acoustic recording. This has increased understanding of the bats across the area and how best to help, provide for and protect them. Of the 17 UK species, 14 were recorded, including some rare bats such as Bechstein's and barbastelle; this will therefore continue to be a real priority for the friary. The way bats use the landscape makes the cooperation of neighbouring landowners over a large area of critical importance, and the cluster is a good platform to ensure this happens.

All of this fills the team with hope because it shows that when people start trying to work in harmony with nature, the benefits begin to stack up. Improvements done to the land for one reason seem to help deliver multiple additional advantages, demonstrating the real power of nature-based solutions.

In October, 12 dormouse houses made of untreated wood were installed across Hermits Wood, the camping field and long meadow. Recycled cables were used to tie them to the tree to expand with the tree's growth.

As part of ongoing strategies to reduce the carbon footprint and use less energy, an ambitious programme of insulating buildings has begun. The outside south wall of the chapel is now gleaming, with new rendering covering hemp bricks which are a natural insulating material. Furthermore, innovative solutions are being considered for solar power battery storage, because a lot of excess energy has been returned to the grid this year.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Grassland, freshwater, native wildflowers, macro moths, English oak, hedgehog

Hugh's Meadow Nature Reserve

Bertie Stirling

All about the partner

The farm that includes Hugh's Meadow Nature Reserve (HMNR) is a beef-producing farm with about 14% + of the land given solely to wildlife and the rest to grazing Shorthorn and Hereford cattle and producing winter fodder. It is a seven-acre site of lowland hay meadow/rush pasture, a rare and declining habitat, in Parkgate, Northern Ireland, and one of the best examples of wildflower-rich meadow in the province.

Creation care

The community event this year was a 'Farm Walk' organised through 'GROWIN', a local farming movement, under the auspices of the Nature Friendly Farming Network. Around 20 farmers and local councillors attended for this tour of the **farm**. Bertie Stirling from A Rocha UK and a local birder talked about what was happening at the pond, and the advantages of it to the 'hobby farmers' who attended.

HMNR is working with St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation & Peace (London) on their new 'Lifelines' project. Lifelines connects community and faith groups with farmers, helping to plant a network of hedgerows and wildlife corridors across the UK. They hope to plant 50m of hedges, with volunteers, whose focus is to help connect people and nature. Efforts are being made to revive some of the soil to its original organic state in the more intensively-farmed areas; some mono-grass pasture has been reseeded with a species-rich mixture, and lime was initially used to increase the soil's pH to help small plants thrive. A no-ploughing and chemical-free policy operates, with grazing happening on most species-rich pasture. Meanwhile, the wildflower meadow areas were left to nature this year and grazed only once for three or four days.

The ponds that were put in just over two years ago are developing well naturally. The two ponds have been full of dragonflies and other insect life, including a myriad of beetles & larvae. Dragonflies seen to date are common hawkler, common darter, common blue damselfly and large red damselfly.

This year buzzards were nesting again, snipe fed here and spotted flycatchers have been recorded, along with various usual species including jay, house sparrow and wood pigeon. There are now ten nest boxes installed, to assist the recovery of woodland bird species. Over the last two years, monitoring of the wild areas on the reserve has revealed around 27 species of birds, 67 species of moths (including a first recorded for County Antrim, an oak beauty) and 120 species of plants (and counting!). Amethyst Deceiver fungus was found underneath the large oak. Other species seen were common grasshopper, grey squirrel, hare, fox, badger, nursery spider and common frog.



STORIES OF HOPE

Launched in July. T25: TBC

Jubilee Farm

Tim Davies

All about the partner

Jubilee Farm, situated on the Glynn River near Larne, is the first NI community-owned farm! As well as producing wonderful food, the 13.5 acres of fields, woodland and river frontage are the perfect setting for families, churches, schools and all kinds of groups to reconnect with food, farming and nature. There is a shop selling farm produce and local crafts, a market garden for growing vegetables; free range, pasture-raised and organic-fed pigs, hens and Shetland sheep; a number of areas specifically managed for wildlife.

The team seeks to provide the chance for animals, biodiversity, the soil and volunteers to flourish by providing activities that connect people with farming and conservation, alongside well-being, in a diverse green space.

Creation care

Groups visit regularly from the local towns as well as from Belfast. There is a weekly conservation volunteer group, which includes local volunteers, asylum seekers and refugees, alongside monthly community volunteer days where the farm manager guides attendees in practical tasks such as veg growing and site maintenance. An average of 10–15 people come to volunteer every month, with a number of those coming multiple times.

Nigerian-born Sunny is a regular volunteer on Tuesdays, where he finds himself feeding a drove of hungry pigs and learning new skills. He said, 'Jubilee Farm has changed my life in a dramatic way. It has given me a new hope for my future, and a new life. Coming here has helped me to appreciate and give value to life.' Sunny attributes much of his happiness here to being involved with, and surrounded by, nature. This is a fantastic example, not only of how much people seeking asylum are able to contribute to the community if given a chance, but the huge importance of the right to work to an individual's sense of dignity and purpose. This was emphasised when the BBC picked up this story: Jubilee Farm featured on Sunday Morning Live and The One Show!

It is in Jubilee Farm's roots to support people through creation care so that they, as well as the natural environment, can flourish. It is a privilege to be able to support community well-being with access to our natural heritage, thanks to the National Lottery Heritage Fund. This has enabled the farm to provide volunteers with a range of workshops, such as bumblebee identification, traditional scything, mindfulness, meditation, breath work classes, grief counselling or simply listening to the dawn chorus; these were attended by roughly 30 people last year.

Jubilee has also received funding for a three-year 'Wildlife and Well-being Project' to expand biodiversity conservation work and involve local school and community groups, to link people to food and nature.

Funding has also been received to employ a young person who has struggled to find their way into the world of work. The new employee who started in autumn is responsible for assisting the farm manager, other staff and volunteers with a wide range of daily community farming activities. They are learning lots of new skills that will stand them in good stead as they develop a wider understanding of where food comes from, along with our impact on the soil and nature in general.



STORIES OF HOPE

Launched in June. T25: Hedgerows, coastal, native wildflowers, farmland & garden birds, bees, house martin, common oak

Knockaloe Beg Farm

Fiona and John Anderson

All about the partner

This 280-acre mixed-use farm on the Isle of Man is a haven for wildlife in its native woodland, grassland and coastal habitats. Landowners John and Fiona Anderson have a community with several young people on-site, as well as having diversified into tourist accommodation.

The team farm sheep, including several rare breeds such as the Manx Loaghtan, Shropshire, Portland, Herdwick and Jacobs. They also have a flock of mules, Tamworth pigs and free-range chickens. The year witnessed the arrival of 918 accommodation guests, 30 school groups of up to 60 children – as well as two litters of piglets, six litters of kittens and over 350 lambs!

Creation care

During the school Easter holidays, 3,800 people were welcomed over seven days for the annual 'Lambing Live' event. Visitors bottle-fed lambs, cuddled kittens, took trailer rides around the farm to feed the ewes, admire the piglets and even ride unicorns (decorated donkeys). Many visitors were also lucky enough to watch Farmer John deliver a lamb or two.

This year, there were two new permanent members of staff in administration and housekeeping roles, as well as returning Duke of Edinburgh and veterinary interns arriving to help during 'Lambing Live'. In addition, it was exciting to employ Jen full-time to put into practice some exciting ideas that there has not been capacity for up to now. Jen has a passion for outdoor education and creativity, and will lead a project called 'Wild & Free @ Knockaloe Beg'. She will be joined by more young people in an internship scheme to encourage more workshops and local food evenings. This will include growing more, alongside living in community and discipleship.

The team are keen tree planters and vegetable growers; a total of 205 pounds of fruit was picked, and prizes were even won at the Royal Manx Agricultural Show!

To encourage wildflowers, seeding has occurred in some areas, while others have been left to grow, especially in the wigwam field. During 'No Mow May', the wildlife really benefited from the wildflowers and long grass around the site. There are three beehives on-site which also enhance growth. Lots of nesting boxes and two feeding stations have also been installed to encourage more farmland birds, particularly house martin. To help the hedgerows grow, more deep hedges have been laid and many oak trees have been planted.

John and Fiona have a desire for Knockaloe Beg to be a place where people encounter Jesus in all that is said and done. Finally, they love sharing all they do with those who come to visit, those who stay in their tourist accommodation and with the wider community.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: hedgerows, freshwater, woodland, dragonflies & damselflies, butterflies, spotted flycatcher, bullfinch, marsh tit

Knowlands Farm

Nick Lear

All about the partner

Knowlands farm of 300 acres in Buckinghamshire, farmed with nature in mind. There are meadows, arable farmland, wetland (a few ponds), hedgerows and a woodland of 75 acres which includes old hornbeam, oak and mixed coppice.

Creation care

Two ponds that were built last year to encourage great crested newts are now established, one of which is thriving. The other pond fills up with rain but it mostly all leaks out again; attempts have been made to fix this by digging up old land drains. Time will tell whether this will work.

New bat recording equipment in spring revealed an impressive nine species, including the scarce barbastelle and brown long-eared bats on the fringe of Knowlands Wood.

Two new owl boxes have been built: one has been put up outside and the other will go in a barn.

The spectacular wood anemones from the cold wet spring were replaced by bluebells as usual early in the year. September weather was kind for the annual mow of the wide rides in the woods.

The annual popular 'Singing with Nightingales' evenings from mid-April through May saw around 1,000 people visiting the area. Joy was had by all through singing and listening, enjoying nature and its calls. Another group who visited were 20 urban refugees from Brighton; despite not being used to the countryside, they enjoyed the space and had a brilliant time, with lots of singing.

Two hedges were surveyed to find out how many species there are in one hedge! Hedge one: ten species plus bramble. Hedge two: 11 species plus bramble. These two hedges are each about 100 yards long, which was impressive! It was also a good summer for butterflies at Knowlands, with most of the usual species including numerous meadow browns and gatekeepers, and a good showing from the resident white admirals and silver-washed fritillaries. The woodland glade is an ideal butterfly habitat: 14 different species of butterflies were recorded in a few hours. These were: small skipper, large skipper, large white, small white, brimstone, meadow brown, gatekeeper, marbled white, ringlet, comma, white admiral, silver-washed fritillary, red admiral and holly blue.

Among the dragonflies, such as large red and beautiful demoiselles, notable were willow emerald damselflies which now breed regularly here, laying their eggs on an ash overhanging the pond.

A goshawk was an exciting species spotted a few times this year, as well as ravens and other raptors including red kite. Other birds seen were: cuckoo, garden warbler, siskin, redpoll, goldcrest and one hawfinch. There was a great harvest of seeds on the hornbeam and birch which attracted these birds. Finally, at the very end of the year, a marsh tit was seen in the woods; this was very exciting as it was the first one in many years.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Woodland, freshwater, macro moths, butterflies (orange tip), common toad

Lea Brook Valley (LBV)

Norman Crowson, Wendy Temple

All about the partner

The LBV is a 20-acre green corridor in the heart of built up Dronfield, near Sheffield. It consists of woodland and grassland with a few large balance ponds, which aim to reduce the effects of surface water flooding.

Creation care

The LBV 'green corridor' continues to be used and enjoyed by many who journey through it on their way to schools, shops and the train station. It is difficult to know exactly how many people access the valley on a daily or weekly basis, but it is likely that several hundred people each day walk along some part of it.

The LBV Green Team, supported by various occasional volunteers, have continued with the monthly litter-picks, regular work days and the weekly warden rota to keep the valley tidy and well maintained.

This year saw the planting of a new hedge and 50 native trees to replace the non-native poplars which were felled last year. These were planted by the project's partners, Yorkshire Water, whose land LBV manages on a 25-year lease. The hedge and trees are all doing well and provide excellent new wildlife habitat.

The Wildlife Area which has been developing over the last year or so was affected by low-level vandalism, resulting in the destruction of the lovely bug hotel. This bug hotel was built by local children as part of the LBV's spring work day. The team did repair it, but it was destroyed again which was frustrating. Unfortunately therefore, the decision was taken not to replace it again. Instead, extra wildlife-friendly shrubs and plants were planted. In addition, the hedging in this area has really become established this year, so the team will monitor it for signs of nesting. The plants seem safe from vandalism – it is any sort of construction that attracts unwelcome attention. It will be exciting to see how the birds and insects use this area in the spring.

Unfortunately, the woodland education area was not used for any kind of formal education this year, mainly because, due to the low-level vandalism in the valley already, the team felt unable to promote it as such. Also, the people who were the main drivers behind the education scheme, and those with the necessary expertise and knowledge, relocated. However, it is encouraging that the space has been well used by groups of young people and families who gather to chat and enjoy the surroundings. The team have been discussing several new ideas for possible future uses of this space.

In order to attract higher numbers of a T25 species – the orange tip butterfly – additional 'Lady's Smock' seeds were sown in the valley. There were a good number of these butterflies spotted early in the summer and the intention is to record numbers more closely next year.

The bog garden was starting to flourish but has become dormant in the winter. The team are looking forward to spring when there will be both new and regrowth of plants that enjoy that level of dampness.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Woodland, native wildflowers, bats, lesser hoeseshoe bat, house martin, English oak

Lee Abbey

Gordon Lee, Corinne de Klerk

All about the partner

Lee Abbey is home to a Christian community that hosts retreats, holidays and conferences on an estate on the dramatic North Devon coast. The Lee Abbey estate covers 280 acres and is part of an SSSI, with its coastal woodland, heathland and pasture habitats, and significant geology and ecology.

Creation care

This summer, Corinne, a new Ecological Officer, joined the staff and has been finding her way as there is a lot for her to discover and do! Tasks on the Lee Abbey Farm include feeding pigs on the farm and in the woods, moving cows, herding feral goats, as well as making sure the sheep are healthy and in the right place. Regular conservation tasks on the agenda are strimming, maintaining the woodland, paths and signposts, and continued management of the ponds in one of the fields.

In autumn, the estate working party focussed mainly on rejuvenating the ponds in the wildlife area. All top three ponds were cleaned and deepened. The top pond needed most work, as it had become a bog rather than a pond. The team were pleasantly surprised by the actual size of it. The fourth pond was left, so that there was a safe place for the pond inhabitants to hide whilst the cleaning took place. The streams feeding the ponds were also cleaned up; getting rid of dead wood and debris in them. Meanwhile a path that had not been used in years was opened, allowing better access to the ponds from the woodlands.

The team joined in the annual round-up of the feral goats in the Valley of the Rocks. The goats outsmarted the humans this year, but it was a wonderful opportunity for bearing witness to the local communities of Lynton and Lynmouth.

The estate team were very grateful to receive boxes for owls and kestrels from A Rocha UK, so much so that they bought more. All the owl/raptor boxes have been put up in several locations around the estate. Chris Baillie has undertaken a count of birds every few months. At the last annual count of the bat colonies this summer, 114 bats were noted.

Among the activities offered are estate and farm walks. In this way, thousands of people are invited to experience God's creation, encounter God in nature, explore our role in being pro-active stewards of creation and are encouraged to share that message when they get back home.

Lee Abbey was pleased to host Andy and Regina from A Rocha UK for an interactive and enjoyable week on what it means to have enough in a world that always demands we have more. The week consisted of conversations and reflections on radically living with enough, and how to bring joy and hope to a struggling planet. This partnership is much appreciated.

Lee Abbey continues to be evangelical about farming, finding God in the beauty of the estate and keeping the main thing the main thing, whilst ensuring sustainability of people and planet in pursuing it.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Grassland, native wildflowers, farmland & garden birds, butterflies, bees, common oak, house martin, common swift, hedgehog

Lichfield Cathedral

David Primrose

All about the partner

Lichfield Cathedral is the only medieval three-spired cathedral in the UK, and is situated in the centre of an acre of land. Becoming a Partner in Action has focused the cathedral community's thinking around biodiversity and they have adopted an ethical and sustainable framework to guide their policies and practices as they care for God's creation.

Creation care

Thousands of visitors pass through the cathedral every year. It was fantastic to have the Gaia exhibition, an enormous inflated globe, hung up in a stunning location, for a few months in 2023 for visitors to admire. This provided for a number of stations around the cathedral for a journey through creation. People were encouraged to walk through and reflect on the different aspects of being involved in the world. Underneath Gaia was a much quieter and reflective vigil for the earth, which included a lot on lament but also hope.

There are over 200 volunteers and an 11-strong garden sub-group, who continue the dedicated maintenance of their patches. An additional group of staff and volunteers manage the grass. Management of the patch of new wildflower meadow within the garden area involved four adults and 12 children in preparing the ground, sowing seed and mowing.

A summer project called 'Flower of the Week' had a stunning sunny weekly photograph taken by one of the garden team posted on the cathedral's social media. This proved a more popular item than anything else!

The first of two new patches of wildflower meadow has been created on the south side of the cathedral this year. This is much more suitable than the experimental strip on the north side, which was used last year to show it could happen. Yellow rattle, oxeye daisy and yarrow were identified and flowered in this first year. However, it was challenging to manage this patch with neat borders and good signage, so this will be a focus in the coming year so that people appreciate the significance of the wildflower meadows.

Another member of the cathedral team who lives beside the cathedral became a beekeeper this year. This will be really helpful in encouraging the bees and wildflowers to multiply.

A highlight this year was planting 50 metres of hedgerow along the eastern wall of the boundary as part of reclaiming the area. There is quite a large drop on the other side of the wall, so the hedge has enabled the area to be safe and open for people to enjoy, as well as improving biodiversity. The local Wildlife Trust and Lichfield Cathedral School donated the whips from the Woodland Trust and were involved in the planting.

One school staff member is their forest school teacher, so Forest School is arranged to coincide with conservation activities around the Cathedral. This year, as in previous years, the children were involved in their Count on Nature, with various classes coming out throughout the week and helping to assess what

Creation care

was in different parts of the land around the cathedral. The children were paired up with the cathedral volunteers for this, to encourage learning and relationships between the children, land and community.

Another positive development this year was that people from the cathedral have become more familiar with iNaturalist. To start with it was frustrating that the records were not being put up on the national diversity network because of a lack of training. However, they still felt it was worthwhile to do, so quite a lot of recording has gone on. People now seem to have got the bug for recording, which will enthuse others.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Grassland, Woodland, hedgerows, native wildflowers, farmland & garden birds, house martin, common oak

Malshanger Estate

Jo Coleman

All about the partner

Malshanger Estate is a 1,000-acre estate in north Hampshire. It hosts a range of habitats: herb crops, managed woodland and parkland, plus a recently-created large wildflower meadow.

Creation care

In 2022, four locally crafted shepherd's huts were commissioned and nestled into a redundant cricket ground that was subsequently made into a wildflower meadow. The shepherd's huts were intentionally constructed using both local craftsmen and estate-grown wood where possible. Since the beginning of 2023, the huts have hosted guests all year round who have enjoyed an immediate immersion into nature from their doorstep.

The transformation from a monoculture grass field to a wildflower meadow is both beautiful and has enriched the biodiversity of the site. Throughout the summer months, it buzzes with pollinators and butterflies enjoying the meadow's oxeye daisies, blue cornflowers and poppies. Then, as the autumn and winter months progress, it provides shelter for smaller mammals, feeding the resident red kite population. There have also been sightings of a barn owl. Bird feeders with sunflower seeds were put up in the summer to which blue tits are regular visitors.

Adjacent to the meadow, a winter bird food wildflower mix of sunflowers, phacelia, buckwheat, maize, borage and crimson clover was planted. Planting this mix in May meant that it flowered after the main meadow flowering was over, providing a winter feast for the flocks of finches and winter thrushes that return during the colder months. The birds and their incredible murmurations, as well as the late flowering wildflowers, created further delight for guests. Beehives are dotted around the edge of this meadow.

The team has also worked on a management plan to continue working on their chosen T25 species and habitats: grasslands, native wildflowers, woodland and garden birds, and bees. The farm operates within a Soil Association registration and is LEAF registered. The essential oils business that is run alongside the farm is registered with Bcorp.

This year, around 50 people have enjoyed formal organised farm visits, and the hope is that this offering will expand into 2024.



STORIES OF HOPE

Launched in June. T25: TBC

Monkstown Village Garden

Aine Gilchrist

All about the partner

Monkstown Village Garden located in Newtownabbey in Northern Ireland, forms part of Monkstown Village Initiatives, whose aim is to develop and support the local community. It is a uniquely designed two-acre urban green space with two polytunnels, 24 raised flower beds, a pergola seating area, a sensory garden, as well as a managed 'wild area'. A qualified horticulturist manages and runs it on organic principles, aiming to increase biodiversity in the area. The space provides an accessible, engaging and learning environment for the local community and beyond for both leisure and social purposes. It also enables regular volunteer sessions for gardeners of all age ranges and backgrounds, where they can share and learn skills in addition to reducing loneliness and increasing community engagement.

Creation care

This garden combines amazing care for nature with sustainable food production for the local community. The Garden Manager and team of volunteer gardeners work together to grow edible and ornamental produce throughout the year. Produce is generally grown annually from seed, saved from previous seasons where possible, grown on, and by summer fills the outside raised beds. This includes many edibles: potatoes, greens, salads, corn, beans, peas, as well as ornamentals such as sunflowers, sweetpea, calendula to name a few. The polytunnel allows the growing of less hardy produce like tomatoes, cucumber, chillies and aubergine, all of which cropped really well this last summer.

The produce is managed by all of the team, who water, weed and tend to the growing plants. It is a great learning opportunity for everyone involved, and the best bit is harvesting the produce and sharing it with the local community through the 'Free Produce' shelf. The volunteers can help themselves to any excess, depending what is available. There has been thinking around how this will work in the coming season to ensure it reaches more people in the local community.

As well as growing and producing, the garden is a great space to run workshops and programmes to benefit the local community throughout the year in all weathers. Some workshops – such as the popular 'Flowerpot Planting' sharing how to plant, maintain and reuse – run in spring and autumn, and there are also seasonal workshops such as sustainable wreath-making using foraged greens. Longer programmes such as six-week Men's Well-being courses are also facilitated to address issues in the community such as isolation. Local Scout groups are also hosted, and support is offered to local church events and clubs. All these improve skills and confidence in attendees, encouraging more people to engage with green spaces and nature. An average of 14 volunteers attend weekly, giving over 40 hours per week; up to 30 people attend each workshop, and 12 participants attend the longer programmes.

Partnering with A Rocha UK has enabled the garden to have a 25-point plan to address improving their biodiversity and progress towards two awards. In 2023, the garden retained its Green Flag Award from Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful (an international quality standard for public green spaces) and was awarded runner-up in the Sustainable Growing category of the Council Area Garden Awards. This garden is a great example of how two acres can deliver incredible results for people and nature.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Grassland, woodland, amphibians, butterflies, macro moths, bees, common swift, common toad

Monkton Combe

Rachel Glasgow, Sarah Sidders, Abigail Button

All about the partner

Monkton Combe is a preparatory and senior residential school near Bath set in almost 250 acres of lowland meadow, mixed woodland, hedgerows, food-growing areas, a river valley and parkland.

Creation care

Throughout the week, all pupils take part in enrichment outdoor activities as part of the school's Wild Monkton programme. There are 688 students, 120 staff and 90 support staff who are really positive and supportive of this. At the prep school, this 'Adventure Education' includes helping out on the farm, planting seedlings in the allotments, feeding the goats and sheep, making fires in the woods or taking lessons outside. The 'Wild Monkton' time for the senior school pupils involves helping with conservation projects, and facilitating them to connect with and enjoy nature, such as building geodomes, clearing streams, managing ponds, making bark-chip paths, planting bulbs and building compost piles. This year's projects have included sustainability walks, working with a local school to enhance their outdoor space, building swift boxes and planting spring bulbs.

In February, there was a Sustainability and Well-being Day for all the senior school pupils. The morning well-being activity was gardening, while the afternoon had 16 stations, each with posters and small activities on sustainability themes such as sustainable fashion, food production, climate politics, carbon footprint and environmental stewardship. The main aim was to educate the pupils on the current environmental challenges, and what efforts are already being made to combat them. The pupils were also given ideas on how to take action to live more sustainably in their own lives. It was a successful day with lots of positive student feedback.

In October, prep school pupils took part in nature-based activities for a 'Wild Monkton' Saturday event, including tree measuring and leaf identification in the woods, forest artwork, obstacle courses, and making bird and bug boxes. The day was full of creativity and learning about nature, and was highly enjoyed by both staff and students.

In the senior school, each boarding house has been leading on a sustainability fortnight. The first one of these has introduced a swap shop and is aiming to shift a culture where reusable coffee cups are used more widely in the school cafe. The next house's aim was to get the whole school involved in the RSPB Great Garden Birdwatch, installing bird-feeding stations, good maintenance habits and encouraging bird identification.

The populations of swifts and house martins at Monkton Combe have done well again this year. Large screaming parties of swifts were observed, and five out of seven artificial nests were occupied. A nature walk in July with Simon Stuart from A Rocha International revealed that there were around 28 house martin nests on-site, with seven out of the eight artificial boxes set up around school buildings occupied.

Creation care

This is notable; Simon thinks this makes it possibly the biggest colony in the local area. Glow worms and a number of bat species were also spotted.

The conservation team have put up seven owl boxes and several small bird and bat boxes around the site during the start of the year. The owl boxes are for tawny owls which have been recorded on-site, and they were built by pupils on the last Field Day in October 2022. Wild Monkton 2022 saw students, with the support of Regina Ebner and Abigail Button, create a bog garden. In 2023, the area is now doing really well and has many well established flowering plants, and dragonflies have been seen in large numbers!

Over the past three years, the orchid numbers at Monkton Senior School have grown exponentially: in one area, a count of three bee orchids has gone to over 50! There is now a mowing regime that encourages this. Pyramidal and helleborine orchids are also on-site.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: woodland, bees, spotted flycatcher

Nether Springs – Northumbria Community

Catherine Askew, Sarah Hay

All about the partner

Nether Springs in Northumberland is a conference and retreat centre as well as the Mother House of the wider dispersed Northumbria Community. Its two and a half acres comprise grassland and woodland areas, formal gardens including a beautiful walled garden with a vegetable-growing area, and a prayer labyrinth.

Creation care

This year has seen a change in the thinking about the space the community occupies and uses.

There have been two very successful gardening retreats, with 15 adults and 2 young people attending in total over both retreats. It was a blessing to have the rapid development of a team, by their willingness and commitment and the sharing of knowledge and skills, like the stringing of onions. One young conservationist helped with the research and then choice of site for the house martin nests provided by A Rocha UK. Some serendipitous scaffolding has allowed for these to be put up ready for next spring. These working groups have set the foundation for the projects at Nether Springs.

The vegetable patch, polytunnel and orchard have continued to be put to good use, with the produce being well used in the kitchen. This is great for residents to feel more connected to nature, by knowing the ground grows food for the house and the guests on site.

An area of grass has been left un-mown over this last year to provide shelter for wildlife. An existing flower bed has been planted with perennial wildflowers, whilst two others have been prepared for seeding with annual native flowers for pollinators. The woodland flower area was tended and is thriving. The hedgehog house was moved closer to a known haunt, and a hedgehog has since been seen shuffling close to it.

Visitors to the motherhouse have enjoyed the outside space to reflect, or to potter in the garden, as part of the monastic rhythm of the house.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Grassland, grassland fungi, house martin, common swift

Nettle Hill

Abigail Lynch

All about the partner

Nettle Hill is a residential conference and retreat centre in Warwickshire with a mixture of grassland and woodland habitats over seven acres. It is pleasing to be on a journey with like-minded and hearted people, endeavouring to restore the earth and reveal God in the everyday.

Creation care

Volunteer days were held for a period of three weeks in January, with an average of 15 people attending. Attention was focused on the restoration and regeneration of the site's seven acres. The main aim was to look after the trees that were in need of coppicing to make room for them to grow. This coppicing made a great difference at the start of the year, and the land has been better as a result of these efforts.

Forest school runs all year round on-site with around 30-40 children attending each week. It offers pre-school and home-educated children lots of time and space to play and engage with nature, make new friends and learn new skills. These range from fire-making and sawing, to making bird feeders, practising knots and identifying species. It is also offered as an alternative provision space called The Hide.

A few Muddy Church sessions were run throughout the year in partnership with folk from Baptist churches in the area. These were well received and attended by about 20-30 people using much of the forest school format and activities. It was a lovely way for people to connect with nature and each other through craft, stories and time outdoors. One highlight was an outdoor Christingle service which families and others enjoyed.

In addition, a Lego therapy group has developed which is going well. A space safe is provided to improve well-being, especially for those with additional needs.

Abigail has started the CRES course and has been enjoying looking into theology as well as being involved in practical activity on the grounds.

There have been a few challenges with the weather as there was a lot more rain than usual towards the end of the year – the pond overflowed and caused flooding. As a result, the three beehives had to be evacuated and moved up to the allotment area. Despite this, both the bees and pond life are thriving, mainly from letting nature find its way through.

Wildflowers are yet to be seen on the unmown areas of grassland, but a range of grasses is growing.

The allotment successfully produced a great range of fruit and vegetables for guests all year round.

A Rocha UK provided a bird box with a camera which was brilliant for forest school. The children loved seeing the blue tit family (seven in total) flying in and out of the nest with various bits of food.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Woodland, coastal, native wildflowers, small mammals, bees, house martin, English oak

Othona Community – Bradwell

Richard and Debbie Sanders

All about the partner

Othona Community – Bradwell is an open and inclusive Christian community with a centre and 29 acres at Bradwell-on-Sea on the quiet coast of Essex. Most of the environment is man-made, as the site is behind the sea wall and the land was originally part of the salt marsh.

Creation care

Groups visit all year round from churches, YMCAs, Buddhist groups and a few schools. One that stands out this year is a not-for-profit group working on data and mathematical solutions for developing countries; for example, they helped organise the data on global warming in Africa to feed into events like COP.

The regular nature-related events this year included both Spring Watch and Winter Watch, where people came to lead or participate in guided walks and discussions. As usual, these involved birdwatching and nature-related topics such as investigating bats or moths or exploring local environmental issues like nuclear power.

An inspiring Environment Week took place in August with around 60 people in attendance. It was a privilege to have Regina Ebner and Rachel Oates from Hopeswood lead wonderful all-age activities. These included making bug-catchers, wild weaving, creating mini-ponds and a labyrinth (or two!). There was also nature art, bug hunts and the creation of a large bug hotel.

The annual Essex Green Weekend was great again this year. Phil Manning from Hazelnut Community Farm gave an excellent talk on community growing. Guests and members helped with conservation tasks on the new 11 acres of land – coppicing, collecting material for and building a dead hedge and relocating the track across the land. Useful clearance took place around a fruit tree area, and the rabbit fence around the peace garden was repaired with the coppiced material (an ongoing task). One Othona member led a walk looking at our coastal ecology and wildlife, at the same time sharing his research on carbon balance in salt marshes. A bat talk and walk were also well received.

For the last three years, Othona Bradwell have hosted a Wild Worship Week aimed at young families. More than 70 people took part in this, which was a great event for all ages and particularly those with additional needs. The leader is ordained as well as being a forest school leader, so she loved helping the children learn through environmental activities and games, getting muddy with a worship component!

There has been some limited tree planting in the upper section of the new 11 acres. Because this area is completely flat, it has been used for camping and car parking in the past, but is now managed largely as a wildflower meadow. The remainder is mostly unmanaged, left to naturally regenerate; it has been fascinating to watch what grows. In December, St Ethelburga's Centre for Peace and Reconciliation started hedge planting along the boundary with the neighbouring arable field. Plans have also begun for creating two large ponds in the lower two fields to encourage wildlife.

Creation care

The vegetable plot has started to improve, thanks to one of the community members who is a gardener. Tasty food was produced to supplement meals, especially in the summer. Apple juice and slightly less successful grape juice were a highlight, while lots of apples were frozen ready for the winter. In addition, the composting is now all organised, and the chef and gardener learned a lot from the Ashburnham HUB event. The small wildflower meadow near the peace garden was absolutely magnificent this year.

Various people, from volunteers to organised groups, come to count moths and birds several times a year. The moth trapper has identified sloe carpet moth, which is a priority species in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. As a result, the team will maintain the conditions it requires in the area where it was found, i.e. unmanaged suckering blackthorn. The trapper was also very excited to trap four specimens of beautiful marbled moth (*Eublemma purpurina*), which has only been seen in the UK in the last 20 years. Meanwhile, 96 bird species were counted over the summer.

Small mammals, particularly voles, must be flourishing in the new rough grassland as all their predators, such as kestrel, barn owl and stoat, have been seen much more regularly. Another exciting species spotted over a period of three months on a camera trap was a pine marten.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Grassland, hedgerows, farmland & garden birds, macro moths, bees, bats, house martin

Ringsfield Hall

Steve Bennett

All about the partner

Ringsfield Hall Activity Centre, based just outside the town of Beccles on the Suffolk/Norfolk borders, sits in around 14 acres of woodland and grassland. It specialises in hosting school and youth residential or day visits, as well as aiming to connect young people with nature and instil a passion for the environment and the protection of the planet.

Creation care

This year, over 30 schools and around 1,200 people were hosted from local and UK-wide youth groups, organisations and schools. These included both returning and new visitors. With the help from partnerships with The Ernest Cook Trust and Country Trust, it was possible to offer part-funding for residential stays for schools which would normally struggle to bring their pupils away. There was also an open day aimed at SEN schools and, indeed, some of these schools were welcomed on-site for residential stays in 2023.

The groups have made full use of the grounds, whether that has been learning about forest layers, doing camp cookery, building shelters, completing their John Muir Award or having fun on the Stone Age Days. Some were even able to plant native trees in the grounds earlier in the year. Evening activities have increased, with groups going out on bat walks, orienteering trails around the grounds, and placing trail cameras to see what comes to visit. Rabbits, deer and foxes were the main camera stars, while the elusive stoat has still not been spotted. There has been an increase in the number of kestrels flying around the site this year, and a couple of hares have also been seen.

The veg and fruit production on-site has increased with some new raised beds, alongside renovating the old fruit and veg growing areas, which a local college group helped with. In addition, a donation of 3-4 tonnes of composted green waste from East Suffolk Council was used.

A link has been established with the Suffolk Bird Group, and they delivered some swift boxes and a programmed speaker that plays the swift call. These will be put up on the house ready for next year, along with the owl box from A Rocha UK.

Further developments across the year include: planting saplings from the Woodland Trust to create new hedgerows; leaving grass areas around the site at varying heights; receiving advice from tree surveyors and a local arborist about the woodland areas. Following any tree work that has been done, the wood has been used as either wood chips on paths, left as log piles for habitat creation or used in the dead hedges that have been started throughout the grounds.



STORIES OF HOPE

Launched in September. T25: TBC

Rock UK – Frontier Centre

Richard Sewell

All about the partner

ROCK UK Frontier Centre is set in Northamptonshire in the heart of England and surrounded by beautiful countryside. The centre has 122 acres of young woodland, a river and lake for water sports and open grounds with stunning views across Stanwick Lakes Nature Reserve along the picturesque Nene Valley.

It is one of four Rock UK centres, the Christian charity that offers outdoor learning and fun for all ages and abilities. Many young people come from across the UK to enjoy the centre, its land and activities throughout the year. Those who visit are largely school groups, with some church and other non-uniformed groups. There were approximately 15,000 visitors to the centre this year, while Rock UK worked with around 65,000 children and young people through its activities nationwide.

Creation care

This year, a lot of the things that had been happening already have been formalised. Many of these are simple, such as not cutting grass all the way up to the tree-line. This is particularly beneficial for the birds because insects from the grass, especially longer grasses, can be eaten by the birds who can then go back into the trees to shelter. Other areas of the site are not mown at all, with the aim of eventually creating wildflower meadows to improve biodiversity and inspire the young people.

At the launch of the partnership with A Rocha UK, a hardback poster was created. This has been put up around the centre to raise awareness of creation care. It includes information about the relationship with A Rocha UK as well as the different mowing regimes being followed. The hope is to positively promote to everyone the conservation activities taking place.

It has been exciting to see staff engaging with the partnership. A recent encouraging example was the team's environmentally considered and sustainable approach to the replacement of a necessary boundary marker. A barrier fence next to the refurbished archery course needed replacing. Instead of choosing wooden poles that need to be replaced periodically, facilities manager Clive and chief instructor Hilary chose to plant a hawthorn hedge. Plants were dug up from stock plants that grow freely around the centre and were planted as required. Once the plants get established, this will have created an environmentally thoughtful and sensitive solution, as well as a barrier that the young people will not try to climb over. Furthermore, the hedge will act as an extension corridor for wildlife too, and a reflection of words from the Bible verse on the poster: '...to work in His garden and keep it' (Genesis 2:15).



STORIES OF HOPE

Launched in September. T25: Woodland, Hedgerows, wildflower meadows, butterflies, common oak

Rock UK – Whithaugh Park

Benjamin Fortescue, Sarah King

All about the partner

Rock UK Whithaugh Park is a residential youth adventure centre situated in the Scottish Borders. Surrounded by forests and rivers, the centre has 130 acres of mixed habitats including woodland, meadow and marshland. Equipped with one of the 7stanes world class mountain bike trails running right next to the centre, the place is suitable for youth outdoor activities, church retreats, team building groups, business meetings and families.

Creation care

A wide range of groups has come throughout the year with a total of 5,805 visitors. The predominant guests were school groups of 9–16 year olds in the summer. Those with additional needs (both physical and mental) have also enjoyed coming, often just to be somewhere different and experience the great outdoors.

The main way guests engaged with nature this year was through the wildlife sensory trail. This encouraged people to look around and see the creation for what it is – beautiful landscape created for us – then subsequently, to think about how we care for it. The trail has music-making sections and a bug hotel. It is key to teach the next generation the importance of caring for the land, so thoughts and ideas have begun for further development of this sensory trail.

Red squirrel feeding stations were installed nearer to the centre this year, to encourage these woodland friends out of the forest to aid monitoring and awareness. As yet, there have still only been sightings of grey squirrels with very limited sightings of reds. It would be wonderful to return to the experience of a decade ago where it was more common than not to see red squirrels on any given day.

Many species of finches, tits and other songbirds were seen. Spotted flycatchers were seen over the meadows, evidence of the thriving insect life there. There are abundant numbers of wild orchids on-site with three species identified (southern marsh, common spotted and heath spotted), as well as many other wildflower perennials. For the foragers, there is a secret and unexplainable rhubarb plant, lots of wild raspberries and bilberries, abundant wood sorrel and a type of mint. In late summer, a huge number of fungi bloomed all over the site, including chanterelles and chicken of the woods.

Thousands of tadpoles from frogs and toads were around the lake in the summer which also attracted herons. A pair of tufted duck nested and reared a single duckling, while two or three pairs of mallard became parents, one with ten ducklings! There have been no confirmed sightings of otters this year, but they visited in 2021 so there is always the chance they will reappear. There is at least one badger set, and roe deer often wander through the wooded areas.

It is exciting to think about what can be done to encourage guests and visitors to spot the wildlife that is already here. Furthermore, the team has been wondering how to encourage more wildlife and for it to come to places where guests can see it. It is great to be in partnership with A Rocha UK to progress and develop these thoughts and plans. In late 2023, Andy Lester led a training day for Rock UK's trainee instructors which combined teaching on creation care theology and practical action creating habitat piles in the woodland areas.



STORIES OF HOPE

Launched in November. T25: TBC

St Crispins Farm

James and Jane Bywater

All about the partner

St Crispins is a 29-acre fruit farm in west Berkshire, which is an incredible space for several habitats, including mixed woodland, wetland, grassland and orchard areas with 400 trees. The orchards were planted 50 years ago and were then commercial, exporting apples to Europe. The fruit farming changes in the 1960s meant that many trees were scrubbed out, leaving only four original orchards: two plum and two apple. These orchards fell into disrepair until James and Jane Bywater bought the farm in 2007.

Restoration started five years later in 2012, followed by a replanting scheme using traditional apple varieties, chosen for taste and flavour. Orchards are a priority habitat, therefore the farm was originally considered by Natural England for Higher Level Stewardship. The farm has been managed along organic principles since 2007 and now has organic certification with Organic Farmers and.

Creation care

Visitors to the farm are always welcome, while friends and neighbours assist regularly with site maintenance and improvements. A few times throughout the year, the local primary school visits to engage with nature by seeing and hearing the wildlife, learning about the orchards, and perhaps even sampling some apples!

The on-site grasslands are species-rich, managed for hay and grazed by sheep. The sheep are organic Soay sheep that joined the farm in 2012, with breeding starting the following year. In the summer, there is a traditional labyrinth mown in one of these fields to create an area for quiet reflection; there is also an area sown specifically with perennial wildflowers. This year, efforts have gone into having more flowering plants in the meadows, not just greenery. Buttercup and lady's bedstraw have been seen throughout the meadow areas, along with gatekeeper and small copper butterflies, plus a range of moth species.

A natural watercourse runs through the land, and a wildlife lake has been reinstated to provide a natural wildlife habitat. This year, a clay-lined area has been dug for the creation of a pond with weeds, reeds and more. The lake has mallard and coot, while Canada geese and swans have been seen at times. Dragonflies, damselflies, frogs and toads were also regularly seen.

Most hedges had been removed when the orchards were intensively managed, so there has been an extensive hedging programme involving planting 3,000m of hedgerows. The only original hedge remaining was laid in a traditional manner. A hundred new apple trees were planted ten years ago, making a total of 400 trees in the orchard. There are five beehives for pollination of the orchards. The site is beside a SSSI woodland and an area adjacent is set aside for its protection. The farm also has on-site pressing facilities for the production of apple juice, cider vinegar and cider.

Creation care

Becoming an A Rocha UK Partner in Action has given a new direction to the farm's environmental work as they look to encourage more birds like the lesser spotted woodpecker, bullfinches, willow warblers and spotted flycatchers. One unexpected benefit of encouraging more birds to the farm may be the control of moths which had been eating apple blossom and leaves. It is a cycle of life: by increasing the number of birds, the moth damage will hopefully reduce.

James and Jane have made significant changes since acquiring the farm and are pleased to have a new focus with wildlife. They have been working to rejuvenate and restore the farm by putting in hedges, planting new apple trees and diversifying the grassland. They run the farm together and love to see the visitors enjoying the ancient orchards again. They are very encouraged to partner with an organisation which shares this care for creation, thinking and praying in the same direction. They are looking forward to working more closely with A Rocha UK and are grateful for the prayer-focused as well as practical support.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Hedgerows, woodland, native wildflowers, butterflies, bees, bats, small mammals, common oak, hedgehog

St Edward's School

Stephan Whelan

All about the partner

St Edward's School is a Catholic community that caters for the learning needs of boys who experience social, emotional and mental health difficulties. Set in 187 acres of mixed habitat, including open parkland, ancient woodland, species-rich grass meadow and more formal gardens, it provides a unique opportunity for pupils and staff to explore projects that have the potential to develop species and habitat diversity.

Creation care

An area to the very front of the school is set aside as a Peace Grove, dedicated to the promotion of world peace and fraternity. This year, St Edward's was encouraged by being one of 200 communities across the UK who were given 6 Sakura Japanese Flowering Cherry trees, as part of a unique good-will project between the Japanese and UK governments.

The process of rewilding an area of grassland in the Walled Garden has begun. Plans have been finalised this year for the construction of a Franciscan Prayer Labyrinth here starting in January 2024. The focal point of the labyrinth will have a scriptural reference. The aim is for three separate pathways away from the labyrinth to represent a person's individual journey, often to a place of safety or sanctuary. These will comprise a seating area, a water feature and a planted area within which one can sit and enjoy a time of contemplation or respite.

A 50-yard section of blackthorn hedgerow has been planted this year that supplements an extensive area of natural blackthorn regeneration in a hedge-line on the southern section of the estate. This is to encourage species such as the brown hairstreak butterfly that are at risk in this area.

To date, the 1,500 trees on the lower 'tree meadow' have been protected with 400 Tubex tree guards. This area, given over to planting by staff and pupils in early 2019, has really begun to develop, with many species of hedge and open parkland trees thriving.

Finally, through Wessex Woodland, a Woodland Development Plan has been developed that envisions the woodland as an integral part of an estate that comprises a wide diversity of habitats, providing for a rich variety of species.

As stewards of the land the school has been entrusted with, the team believe it is their responsibility to manage it in a way that complements the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 15: Life on Land, and the values espoused in Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si'*. They are therefore committed to protect, restore and sustainably manage woodland areas, to promote habitat and species diversity and to halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss. To do this, eight practical objectives have been put in place. These include environmental (e.g. ash tree thinning and felling), economic (e.g. exploring the viability of timber harvesting), and social (e.g. enhancing the educational resource the woodland represents, by the extension and careful maintenance of 'rides', 'access corridors' and glade creation).



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Grassland, freshwater, native wildflowers, dragonflies & damselflies, house martin, common toad

St Madoc Activity Centre

Heather and Rob Lyne

All about the partner

St Madoc Activity Centre is based on the coast of the Gower Peninsula, Britain's first AONB. The team host groups in bunkhouse style accommodation to engage with nature through the woodland, beach, sea view and idyllic chapel. Across spring to autumn, they provide youth adventure weeks for local (and further afield) schools and youth groups.

Creation care

In 2023 visitor numbers returned to re-pandemic levels. Schools, colleges, universities, youth groups, church groups and sports clubs, were all welcomed back. One highlight was the No3 Welsh Wing RAF Air Cadets; an incredible group of young people and a great team of leaders and instructors. Also arriving for the first time were God's Squad Christian Motorcycle Club. There were a total of xxx guests over the year.

Visitors came to explore the great outdoors and the wonders of nature across the site through various activities including rock climbing, archery, pond dipping and team games to name a few. Rock pool exploration was added to the list of primary school activity offerings for the first time and was very successful. Young visitors really enjoyed learning about life along the shoreline as well as dipping for crabs.

A team of volunteers meets every Tuesday for general jobs around the centre. They worked hard all year with ground maintenance such as clearing bracken. Bracken control is an essential management regime for various types of habitat, particularly rough grassland. The aim is to reduce the vigour of bracken, which if left unchecked would smother other flora beneath it. Another job this team completed early in the year was the new jetty; this allowed pond dipping sessions for school residentials to continue.

There was a family fun day in April with archery, drumming, animal encounters and orienteering. Moreover a Family Easter Fun Day, included craft, a story walk and meeting the newest arrivals – lambs and chicks!

Hedgehog boxes sourced through A Rocha were placed in the woodland area; it is exciting waiting to see what moves in. Three beehives are also kept in the woods by local beekeeper David. The bees have collected nectar from Llanmadoc Hill earlier in the year, to produce some wonderful honey. This was packaged up and available to buy. Food doesn't get more local than this!

In spring, an outside light where house martins had previously nested was fixed. It was thought it was too late for them to build a new nest there. Subsequently, in June it was a surprise to find a new nest and 3 or 4 new house martins! Sparrows, blue tits, robins and chaffinches were seen regularly. In the hot June weather lizards were more commonly seen. As always, many young people enjoyed their time here as they were encouraged to enjoy the beautiful natural surroundings, particularly in the woodlands, across the sand dunes and on the wide sandy beach.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Grassland, hedgerows, freshwater, woodland, native wildflowers, butterflies, house martin, common toad, hedgehog

Scargill House

Phil Stone, Anna Reily

All about the partner

Scargill House is set in a 90-acre estate in the spectacular Yorkshire Dales. It is home to a Christian community that hosts people for holidays, conferences and retreats, and whose priority is to make the estate's grassland, woodland, fresh water and hedgerows a welcoming place for plants and animals as well as people.

Creation care

There are regular volunteers who come and help with work on the estate and in the gardens – four on a Monday and one on a Friday. Furthermore, once or twice a month, one or two volunteers come for a one-off week or weekend to help. They work on a variety of tasks from conservation work like woodland management to tending the gardens. Guest numbers average at around 80 people per week (from Monday to Sunday), these numbers include those who come multiple times a year and those who have never visited before.

In May, an Act for Nature Day was held with about 25 people plus the A Rocha UK team. People came from the local area or from locations within a couple of hours away. There were talks on campaigning with A Rocha UK, and some practical sessions out and about on the estate. One aim of this day was to get people more involved practically with conservation tasks, so habitat piles were created and the dead hedge was extended in the sensory garden. During a survey in the afternoon with the community, a huge variety of flora and fauna was found. This was a great encouragement to those involved to look closely at their surroundings to become more aware of the beauty and abundance of creation everywhere. It is hoped that attendees took this principle home and put it into practice.

A Young Rangers Day was held with 20 young people plus volunteers. The Young Rangers are a group run by the Yorkshire Dales National Park. Once a month, they travel to different locations to encourage 11–18 year olds to experience the countryside and learn new skills. Here they learned about traditional woodland management skills: coppicing and charcoal burning, preparing the saplings by cutting them to size and then stacking the kiln. They enjoyed being outdoors in a new environment, appreciating the space, experiencing the woodlands and having nature around them whilst they worked.

In November, A Rocha UK Partners in Action came together at Scargill for their annual opportunity to learn, share and pray for each other in person. Andy Atkins, A Rocha UK's CEO, and local trustee Colin Beale joined for a day to speak and encourage those who gathered. Andy Lester shared something of the current national and worldwide environmental scene, and John from Hazelnut Community Farm shared about land and justice. It was a great time to get to know other Partners, gaining insight from each other.

There is a management plan on caring for the sensory garden which is still developing. The aim is to make it a more accessible space than the wooded estate, so that guests and community can come and immerse

Creation care

themselves in nature. There is a bench, bug hotel, pond, dead hedging, a live hedge, fruit trees and sensory plants, as well as lots of long grass interspersed with a variety of wildflowers.

There are a couple of meadows on the estate managed for native wildflowers which attract many butterflies, moths and bees. Areas of grass were left uncut for longer periods of time during the year and, after being cut, the excess grass was raked off. This allowed the wildflowers time to develop and be a good food source for birds and other insects.

Scargill House, being near the River Wharfe with farmland and meadows, is ideal for house martins, so there is a house martin population here; swallows and swifts were also seen enjoying themselves in the grounds.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Grassland, native wildflowers, bees, house martin, common swift

Southwell Minster

Paul Rattigan, Hugh Middleton

All about the partner

Southwell Minster in Nottinghamshire is The Cathedral and Parish Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and is surrounded by 20 acres of gardens, grassland, woodland and wild meadow. The Archbishop's Palace Gardens have four distinct parts: a medieval herb parterre; a Tudor knot garden; a border planted in the style of Edwardian plantswoman Gertrude Jekyll; and wildlife areas including a winter border.

Creation care

Through the year, some 60,000 visitors came through the door, and many were exposed to the group's display board and encouraged to pray for creation. There is now an established round of quarterly, seasonal prayer leaflets and, during COP 28, there was a display of issues and concerns for visitors' attention.

More than 10,000 people attended the Gaia exhibition, with planet earth hanging from the ceiling in the form of a huge sphere of light and colour – a remarkable experience which the team enhanced with material of their own and prayer leaflets for visitors to take home.

The Southwell Minster Environmental Action Group (SMEAG) is a group of volunteers working alongside the Cathedral Chapter and executive. A key achievement this year has been to establish a presence on the Southwell Minster (SM) website which provides a public announcement of the commitment. SM is on the cusp of being eligible to apply for Silver Eco Church status. The group have also been successful in supporting the installation of some 30 swift boxes around the town, and continue to explore possible installation sites on the Minster itself.

Contact and relationships continue to be developed with other like-minded organisations in the town and further afield, such as the local Climate Coalition, Town Council and Green Southwell, with whom the Minster hosted a Green Fair. Some dozen stalls were set up, offering information and advice on greener banking, repairing clothing, vegetarian cooking, the Climate Coalition's campaign, and more.

In terms of conservation and biodiversity, it was pleasing to see twayblade orchids and great burnet moth established in our 1.72ha local nature reserve, Potwell Dyke, and there have been further sightings of the Clifden nonpareil moth, first seen there in 2022.

In autumn, during the Season of Creation, borrowed potted saplings and water features were used to form an avenue along the south quire aisle. The aim was for visitors to experience SM's commitment to caring for creation. The water features reflected Amos 5:24, 'But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everlasting stream'.

Outside, there are plans to rewild areas of the very public Minster Yard. These will include a small plot bordering Westgate, which is a widely-used thoroughfare. Its neatly mown lawn and carefully planted geraniums will be no more – a challenge to 'normality'. There is consent from the CEO, but it has yet to be

Creation care

agreed with the Facilities Advisory Committee which has oversight of changes to the grounds and building. The head gardener of the grounds has acquired the mixed blessing of badgers' set this year – a challenge to deal with!

Finally, how to proceed with an additional piece of grassland that is now owned by SM? A Roman villa once stood to its east. This land became an Anglo-Saxon graveyard, then farmland for a few centuries until a school was built on it in the 1970s. Some ten years ago, the school was moved to a different site, and the land was sold to developers wanting to build executive homes. However, out of the blue, a donor came forward who bought the land from the developers and gave it to the church. This patch includes a stream that needs work on as part of a flood mitigation scheme, but once that is complete, it can form the basis of a newly established area of wetland connected to the existing local nature reserve.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Freshwater, grassland fungi, bullfinch

Stampwell Farm

Frog Orr-Ewing

All about the partner

Stampwell Farm is an ancient fruit and livestock farm on the outskirts of Beaconsfield in Buckinghamshire, with 70 acres of land that includes woodland, hedgerows, meadows, ponds and orchards. It is also the home of Latimer Minster, a church and Christian community. Therefore they focus on serving the needs of the local and regional community, while incorporating holistic farming techniques and conservation.

Creation care

The local and wider community have been drawn to the peace and wildness of the site. Subsequently, through working with churches and youth groups, with the aim for people to meet with God, various events have been run. There has been a quarterly dedicated time for worship, poetry and prayer called The Well (formerly called Oasis). All were invited and each quarter the form varied: in February, it was more simple with uninterrupted time and space; in June, The Well was an afternoon of worship in the barns, field and forest, with poetry, liturgy, worship and new songs by creatives and songwriters such as Lucy Grimble. At later events, there was a word and a Eucharist on a profound scripture in Jeremiah 31. Finally, there was time to draw joy from the wells of Jesus' saving grace and seek hope for the UK, the Anglican Communion, the earthquake in Turkey and the war in Ukraine through lament, adoration, praise and worship.

On Easter Sunday morning at 7am, an outdoor short service of worship was held, with Easter hymns, readings and prayer. This was open to all and those who came felt inspired and blessed.

Through local community-supported agriculture, Stampwell is home to the Chalfont Beekeepers, and has chickens, three donkeys and a small flock of sheep. The flock of Shetland sheep has been here since 2013, and the varieties produced are traditional and slow-maturing, meaning that a larger proportion of the flock winters here than on most farms. Grazing is holistic, moving the sheep around the farm on a rotational grazing system, which means they are able to enjoy the shade of the orchards in the heat of summer and the calm of the 'Serengeti' paddocks in the lambing season. This does much for the work of wildlife restoration, and is sympathetic with the management of the land that is sensitive to orchid and wild flower propagation. The team has also been enhancing and improving the quality of the wool and the meat.

There are fruit trees such as plums, damsons and cherries. Stampwell also grows seasonal vegetables, herbs and asparagus in small raised beds and market gardens. This year they have begun the process of recovering and renewing the historic orchards, enhancing the environment with a proactive approach to creation care, and ensuring this small farm can be closely connected to the community it serves for many years to come.

Pond restoration has occurred in previous years; consequently this year, the water stayed and pond life returned! Grass returned and the sunlight gave life again, welcoming ducks, amphibians and more wild

Creation care

animals and sheep to find succour here.

By using holistic grazing techniques, ecosystem protection and restoration of the farmland, there has been an annual increase in recorded wildlife species such as plants, birds and insects. Last year, there were breeding hobbies and kestrels, many more sparrowhawks, and skylarks nesting on the meadow.

The farm is home to the specialist coffee roastery of Nuach Coffee, which not only produces incredible ethically sourced, hand-roasted coffee, but all waste products are used around the farm for animal feed, fertiliser and firewood.

The vision for Stampwell is to be a kind place, where people who need the tender care of God can really find it, as well as health, wellness and fruitfulness in their own lives, as they walk, meet animals and people and explore what it means to follow God in community with one another.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Freshwater (ponds), butterflies (Duke of Burgundy), macro moths

Steyning Downland Scheme

Matthew Thomas, Bethany Priest

All about the partner

The Steyning Downland Scheme (SDS) began when the Goring family set aside 165 acres of the Wiston Estate in the South Downs National Park, West Sussex, for the benefit of the community, the land and its wildlife. The site is made up of open grassland, a stream, ponds and mixed woodland.

Creation care

During the year, 400 pupils from various schools came, sometimes to aid conservation efforts. In spring, the Upper Horseshoe Bridleway was almost impassable, with overhanging brambles and other vegetation. College students did a magnificent job of clearing this to allow walkers to use it again.

Meanwhile, Steyning Grammar School (SGS) pupils made a special trip to the Millennium Seed Bank at Wakehurst Place to learn all about growing starfruit plants. Once found in old farm ponds all over Sussex, starfruit (*Damasonium alisma*) is now extremely rare – it's extinct in this county and listed in Schedule 8 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981. However, the newly restored mill pond on the rifle range is just right for starfruit! Thanks to a very generous grant from the Steyning Society, all parties involved teamed up to propagate some tiny starfruit plants. The planting of these is planned for spring. A traditional chestnut pale fence has also been added to the pond to guide dogs towards a dedicated 'dog splash' area.

Engaging young people in nature and the natural world has always been a top priority for the SDS, but with a lot of plates spinning, this vital work hasn't always had the attention it deserves. Thanks to very generous donations from the Wilson Memorial Trust and the Nineveh Trust, all that has started to change with the new Youth Engagement Worker role. In the summer, Beth Priest began work three days a week, contacting local schools and other local young people's groups to develop a programme of nature-oriented activities. She has also started setting up a Junior Management Board, made up of local school children, which will work with the adult management groups to guide the future direction of the SDS.

Community family events included a late-night glow worm hunt, an archaeological dig on the rifle range and 'Rifles at the Ready', which went ahead despite battling a robust Dexter escape attempt and a thunderous downpour. Families came along and had a great time exploring, learning and playing in the countryside.

A new seven acres called Wylie's Field was given to the SDS charity in July, thanks to the generosity of the Wiston Estate. While the rest of the nature reserve has free public access, this field will be kept as a vital sanctuary area, where wildlife like adders, butterflies and ground-nesting birds can live undisturbed.

The friendly Dexter cattle came back on the rifle range and Steyning Coombe in the autumn. They spend the winter chomping down the vegetation, and without them (and a lot of hard work from the Conservation Volunteers), all the grassland would soon revert back to brambles, scrub and then dense, dark and rather

Creation care

ecologically boring sycamore woodland. So all those chewing mouths are vital for the scarce chalk grassland wildflowers to thrive. Thanks to a wonderfully generous grant from the John Lewis Foundation, the cattle are all wearing Nofence collars. Using these, the team has absolute dictatorial power to be able to tell them exactly where to chew and when. Thanks to Nofence technology, the cattle's whereabouts can also be tracked in real time!

The newly formed Moth Recording Group at the SDS found an astonishing 85 species and also a large number of butterfly species in their first few weeks. Species found included grass rivulet which is listed as Endangered by the IUCN (Red List).



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Grassland, freshwater, native wildflowers, farmland & garden birds, bats, small mammals, house martin, red squirrel, common oak

SU – Alltnacriche

Hannah Steeds

All about the partner

Located near Aviemore in the Cairngorms National Park, Alltnacriche is an outdoor education and activity centre, part of Scripture Union Scotland. It has 17 acres of mixed woodland (including hanging ash, beech, sessile oak), Caledonian forest, grassland, upper meadows and freshwater habitats (a river).

Creation care

Throughout the year Alltnacriche run primary school residential every week during term time. The pupils have the opportunity to participate in various nature-based activities. Examples include: Bee conservation sessions – why bees are important, solitary bees and making underground bee houses. Bracken bashing – what is bracken, why remove it and practically having a go! Wildflower meadow enhancement – minibeast hunts, learning what lives in the meadow, clearing small patches of plants alongside planting wildflower seeds and juniper. Conservation lesson plans have been written down to make it easier, with accurate information on species, for instructors to deliver.

Throughout the year, Alltnacriche ran primary school residential every week during term time. The pupils have the opportunity to participate in various nature-based activities. Examples include: bee conservation sessions – covering why bees are important, solitary bees and making underground bee houses; bracken bashing – what is bracken, why remove it and practically having a go; wildflower meadow enhancement – minibeast hunts, learning what lives in the meadow, clearing small patches of plants alongside planting wildflower seeds and juniper.

Conservation lesson plans, with accurate information on species, have been written down to make it easier for instructors to deliver. Schools have really enjoyed engaging with these and seeing conservation in practice.

During 2023, approximately 950 pupils from 31 schools benefited from the site, and pupils who came for a two- or three-night stay achieved the National Outdoor Learning Award. Pupils who came for four nights engaged in conservation projects which count towards their John Muir Discovery Award. At weekends and during holidays, Alltnacriche is used by groups from churches, conferences and youth organisations. This means that even more people enjoyed the beautiful setting and space.

The team have installed house martin boxes and a squirrel feeder. Two spotted flycatcher boxes were built and fitted, while an owl box has been built. These aren't in use yet, but hopefully will be soon.

The mowing has been reduced this year with no-mow meadow areas. A wildflower meadow has been created and has begun seeding. These have both already begun to reduce carbon and increase biodiversity.

The pond has been maintained and has various insects, newts and voles residing in or near it. This is great for the bird populations which have begun to move further north due to the climate crisis.

Creation care

Finally, to keep track of species seen, iRecord has been used more often this year. A wide range of birds has been spotted this year including a significant house martin population, woodcock, grey heron, tawny owl, buzzard, kestrel, red kite and pied flycatcher, plus many plant, insect and animal species.

There is much more to come. The team are excited about the potential and are looking into nature cameras, bird feeders, and even thinking about ways to involve pupils in growing their own food.

A Primary 6 pupil visiting the centre commented, 'Alltnacriche was an amazing place, I loved the archery, zip line, conservation and gorge walking... I had an awesome time with my friends. I've learned the difference between ferns and bracken, and that you can eat wood sorrel!'



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Grassland, freshwater, native wildflowers, butterflies, amphibians, house martin, red squirrel

SU – Lendrick Muir

Tim Forsythe, Grace Beaven

All about the partner

SU – Lendrick Muir, part of Scripture Union Scotland, is on 120 acres, about half of which is untamed grassland and woodland. Since becoming a Partner in Action in winter 2021, they have been seeking to increase the site's biodiversity, fulfilling the team's wish to 'do something more exciting than just "cutting the grass"' by developing the site's fantastic potential for wildlife.

Creation care

Over 9,000 guests stayed in 2023, including schools, churches, Guides, youth groups, orchestras, music groups and SU Holidays and residential. Of the 9,000 guests who stayed at the centre, almost 2,500 of those came as part of a school residential between February and November, and enjoyed exploring the grounds through outdoor activities and the environmental education programme.

The new 'Discover & Explore' sessions were launched this year: one on 'Nature' and one on 'Sustainability'. These are focused on getting the young people who visit the centre out exploring the environment, encouraging them to grow in understanding and appreciation for the natural world. Plans are in place to add to this programme with the addition of a conservation session, where pupils will have the opportunity to take part in conservation activities and be involved with looking after the land at Lendrick Muir.

In August, a new environmental instructor started at Lendrick Muir to develop the environmental education programme that began earlier in the year, and to assist with conservation of the grounds.

Towards the end of the year, the brand new 'eco-residential' was advertised for which the preparation has taken place. This will be an exciting opportunity to encourage young people to build a connection with nature through in-depth exploration of the wonderful range of habitats across the site.

Across the site, various revisions have been made to the habitat management. Key changes include rethinking around how the grassland areas are mowed, with some no-mow areas filled with Scottish bluebells, and leaving more wildlife corridors. The maintenance of the wildflower meadow has continued, with yellow rattle in particular abundance this summer.

The woodland areas have been teeming with fungi this autumn, and the young people have loved trying to find a wide range of fungi. Red squirrel feeders and pine marten feeders have been put up around the site. More red squirrels have been seen this year – once a whole family of five spotted together!



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: freshwater, woodland, dragonflies & damselflies, butterflies, bees, amphibians, red squirrel, hedgehog

The River Rectory

Sarah-Jayne and Terry Pomeroy

All about the partner

The River Rectory (RR) is a family smallholding in Northern Ireland, owned and managed by the Pomeroy family who are passionate about looking after their land for nature and community. It is a stunning 18th-century rectory and farm surrounded by six acres of land, with a range of habitats including scrub woodland, orchards, wildflower meadows, small ponds, wet grassland and exciting food-growing spaces.

Creation care

In the spring, new bird boxes and hedgehog boxes were installed, creating habitats that support local wildlife. Rocks from the river were repurposed to make pools, attracting a group of pond skaters – a delightful addition that reflects the dedication to enhancing environmental diversity. These pools, with sections of slow-flowing water, have become preferred spaces for various species.

Also in spring, exciting building projects were started, including new animal housing integrated within the facade of the original stable buildings. This innovative approach preserves the site's historical charm.

Additionally, the 'sustainability kitchen' is being enjoyed, a project that involved the restoration of the River Rectory's original historical kitchen. Here, the hooks are once again adorned with culinary and medicinal herbs cultivated and foraged from the property. The apple press and pasteuriser have been busy processing this year's apple harvest into delightful creations such as juice, chutneys and canned apple pie filling. In this new space, the organic oats can be processed for delightful porridge and flapjacks, the freshly milled flour made into breads, and the goodness that God's land produces can just simply be enjoyed! This culinary endeavour not only celebrates the bounty of the land but also echoes the sustainable practices held dear.

One highlight during the year was the flourishing wildflower and food-growing areas, which teemed with life throughout the summer. The mixed wildflower and oat patch, in particular, yielded great success. With careful planning that involved light tilling and the sowing of last year's organic oat seed in spring, an impressive 20kg of oats were harvested at the end of the season.

What makes this harvest truly special is the unexpected growth of greater bird's-foot-trefoil, a vital species for marsh fritillary butterflies. This discovery emphasises the positive impact of the pesticide-free approach taken and working harmoniously with nature. Therefore this year's harvest demonstrated that it's possible to cultivate crops while fostering biodiversity.

The commitment to sustainability extends beyond the fields to Bella, Koppar, Padme and Coalie – four young goats who have joined the existing community of sheep and chickens. Their presence enriches the environment, contributing to the vibrant tapestry of life.

Beyond physical efforts, there is belief in fostering discussions and sharing knowledge. This creation-care site is not just a space for cultivation; it's also a hub for dialogue. Therefore, discussion forums have been hosted and facilitated with the theme of 'Transforming Christian Communities to Care', exploring trauma-informed approaches to Christian community. This, combined with the commitment to creation care, embodies what the RR is all about – nurturing nature and fostering resilient, compassionate communities.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: TBC

The Rock Christian Fellowship

Delia Du Preez

All about the partner

Located on the beautiful and remote St Helena Island in the South Atlantic Ocean, The Rock Christian Fellowship is a committed, Christ-centred church with a focus to reach out and make disciples in St Helena.

Creation care

Unfortunately, the conservation efforts have been limited in 2023. The previous coordinator for A Rocha UK moved on from the church, and in the interim period, a Brazilian couple took over who worked for The National Trust on the island. However, near the end of the year, their contract ended, so they left the island. The church is praying that God will raise someone up to take on this vital role.

At the end of 2022, the team bought a building with a beautiful garden surrounding it. To begin with, the grounds needed tidying up and some old containers removing. In 2023, the congregation added new plants throughout the year, as well as carrying out general maintenance, which has involved cutting the hedges and lawns, and improving habitats for insects.

Throughout the year, young people from the church, a local Brownie group and the wider congregation were engaged in various nature events. These usually involved walking to Flagg Staff and praying together, using God's creation as inspiration. Plants and birds were observed, in particular the wirebird, which is indigenous to the island. Children and families connected with God and nature while having fun together.

In March, an event called Creation Fest was held on-site, with a week of creation-care activities. Each day had a different theme using a colour from the rainbow and how it related to nature. The church and local families who came were encouraged to think about and be thankful for God's wonderful world around us. The week was well attended and as a result a youth group was started on Friday evenings!

The church is passionate about sharing God's love and good news with the local community, as well as caring for nature. Working in partnership with A Rocha UK, The Rock Christian Fellowship and Every Home for Christ, the Seeds of Hope project has continued to deliver packages of sunflower and pumpkin seeds to homes on the island. The seeds, when they flower, will provide a great source of food for the island's many endemic pollinators – species found here and nowhere else on earth! St Helena has the largest list of endemic pollinator species for any UK Overseas Territories and significantly more than the UK mainland – 502 compared to 90. The project has also been a great tool for reaching out to the local community and expressing Christ's love to them through caring for the surrounding environment.

The church hopes for more opportunities to collaborate with others in sharing God's love for all of his creation and inspiring people to take action for nature locally. One of these for next year is the Cloud Forest Project, linking with The National Trust for St Helena's Peaks National Park.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Grassland, bats, hedgehog

Tinhay Retreats

Suzy and Rob Weston

All about the partner

Tinhay Retreats in Devon is a wild camping and retreat space comprising eight acres of grazed meadows, a river valley and floodplain, scrub woodland and hedgerows.

Creation care

This year was the 20th anniversary of Rob's ordination as a minister within the URC. This meant that Rob and Suzy had a three-month sabbatical, leaving Tinhay Retreats in the very capable hands of their son, Toby. One highlight of the sabbatical was visiting a large nature reserve and retreat centre run by A Rocha France.

A good number of people visited for camping and glamping this year, with over 150 campers between April and October. All were encouraged to see the land, explore the fields and wildflower meadow and to spot the wildlife in the hedgerows. Many visitors were really keen to share their sightings, and Suzy has been able to update iRecord more frequently.

Throughout the year, a small number of retreat days and away days were held with visitors from many different denominations. The October day retreat was focussed on caring for creation. Again, all guests engaged with the peaceful natural environment and enjoyed seeing what has been growing.

On the meadow field, the perennial wildflowers are well established, but annual wildflowers will add to the diversity. There are two pasture fields for the small flock of seven sheep; some new fruit trees have been added in one of these fields. The chickens had to be kept under cover for a while this year due to avian flu precautions. In the camping field, a new beech hedge planted over the last three years is growing well and around 40 tree saplings were planted around the campsite this spring.

Birds seen included snipe, buzzards, marsh tits, long-tailed tits, wrens, great spotted woodpeckers, to name a few. Bats have several roosts on-site and are regularly seen from dusk onwards. In addition, there has been an increased number and variety of butterflies this year, including speckled wood, peacock, comma, red admiral, orange tip, small tortoiseshell, brimstone, small white, meadow brown and ringlet.

One highlight this summer was the first barn owl at Tinhay Retreats in five years. This caused great excitement, especially for those who had never seen one before. This is likely to indicate the success of the change from pasture land to three acres of meadow field. As a result, this has enabled an increase in the local vole population to sufficient numbers for the barn owl to take up residence.



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: Grassland, freshwater, native wildflowers, dragonflies & damselflies, bees, amphibians, small mammals, common toad

Wolf Fields Nature Reserve

Andrew Samuel

All about the partner

Wolf Fields is A Rocha UK (ARUK)'s urban community nature reserve in Southall, West London. It covers three acres with an orchard, community allotment, beehives, braille and audio interpretation, sensory garden, meadow, art installation area, prayer labyrinth, ponds and a story-telling area for children.

Creation care

At the start of this year, a new reserve manager, Andrew, was appointed. As Wolf Fields had been without a manager for a few months, much of his initial practical involvement was clearing brambles and opening up spaces, as well as getting the allotment, sensory garden and food-growing areas back up and running. This has been achieved with support from regular weekly volunteer sessions. Three new people have joined, including someone who is looking at restarting beekeeping for next year and another keen on food growing.

A volunteer group from St Andrew's Oxshott visit the reserve on the fourth Wednesday of every month. These visits have gone a long way in helping take pressure off Andrew as well as maintaining the sensory garden.

Five church groups from Bronze or Silver Eco Churches came throughout the year for day visits, to explore, see examples of good practice and to take away ideas of what they can do on their own patch.

There were regular school visits during April to June, mostly from primary schools from Reception to Year 6. The main activities were pond-dipping and bug hunts. During the summer, students were able to see fully grown newts, dragonflies and damselflies, as well as newt tadpoles and dragonfly nymphs. It was excellent for their learning to be able to see the species in different stages of their life cycles.

An Easter sunrise service attended by 45 people was led by Kailean Khongsai and Dave Bookless, and was followed by hot drinks and food.

At the A Rocha UK monthly staff and volunteers' meeting in June, the afternoon was spent at Wolf Fields. It was lovely spending time together over shared lunch, prayers and in respective departments. This was followed by litter-picking the alleyway leading to the site and mulching the community orchard. Over the year, four other litter-picks took place with a local community group from Ealing.

In September, 14 people attended the A Rocha UK Act for Nature Day, during which time they helped to revamp the sensory garden and prepare the allotment for autumn and winter produce. CEO Andy Atkins spoke about A Rocha UK's aims and vision. Subsequently, there were discussions on how to act for nature through a simple campaign action.

Creation care

Another practical project has been around the ponds, exploring ways to keep up the water level as it dropped quite low in the summer. Possible methods are rainwater harvesting or using water from the council. More recording in and around the pond has taken place, as well as across the rest of the site to get a good baseline of species. Next year, the hope is to have community survey days for local volunteers.

Species found on-site during these surveys so far have included dock bug, nursery web spider, running crab spider, common carder bee, tawny mining bee, buff-tailed bumblebee, white-tailed bumblebee, black clock beetle, smooth newt, emperor dragonfly, common blue damselfly, broad-bodied chaser, speckled wood, comma, cabbage white, red admiral and peacock butterflies, blue tit, great tit, long-tailed tit, house sparrow, dunnock and more!



STORIES OF HOPE

T25: N/A

Woodland House of Prayer

Rachel Oates

All about the partner

Woodlands House of Prayer (formerly at Brunel Manor, Torquay) is continuing to go through a period of transformation and will soon be completing the change of its 'everyday' name to Hopeswood (reflecting the new direction). This is a Christian charity rooted in prayer, committed to helping those in need of rest and restoration to find new strength and hope, through reconnecting with God, each other and nature.

Creation care

2023 has seen the continued growth and development of the link with Lee Abbey. The new Hopeswood Bursary is becoming well established and has helped over 200 people stay at Lee Abbey who would otherwise not have been able to afford to visit.

In addition, Hopeswood gifted Lee Abbey a detailed energy review which has been enabling them to map out actions and projects needed to reach net zero carbon. Following on from that, support has been given to a project at Lee Abbey to install solar PV on their farm barns, thus generating more renewable electricity on-site.

The charity has hosted two Christian well-being weeks at Lee Abbey thanks to their hospitality. These were attended by 15 people on average.

Furthermore, they have been able to contribute to a family Eco Week with fellow Partner in Action Othona Bradwell. All 30-40 guests had a wonderful time joining with the daily rhythms of the Othona Community as well as the practical activities. These ranged from making mini wildlife ponds, wildflower seed-bombs and finding all sorts of interesting wildlife from minibeasts to bats.

Finally, during 2023, a new website has been developed which will go live in the near future. This is designed to be a resource for Christian well-being, with a creation/nature focus. It will be using the Hopeswood name, with the new logo and the tagline 'Be restored'.

